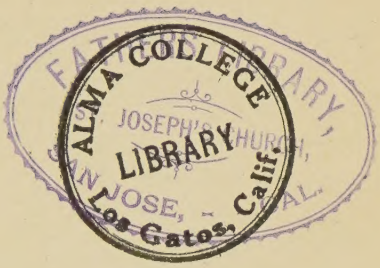
# The Practice of Mental Prayer

René De Maumigny, S.J.

Extraordinary Prayer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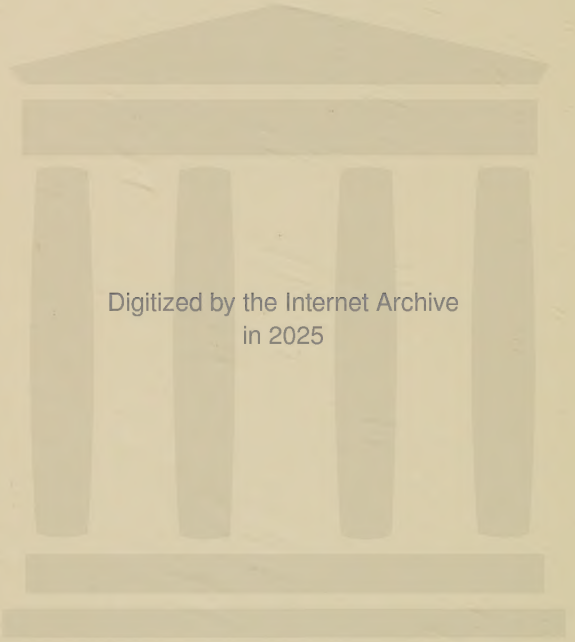

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# THE PRACTICE OF MENTAL PRAYER

BY

FATHER RENÉ DE MAUMIGNY
*of the Society of Jesus*

*SECOND TREATISE*

**Extraordinary Prayer**

*Translated from the Fourth Edition with the Author's corrections and additions.*

TRANSLATION REVISED BY

FATHER ELDER MULLAN, S.J.

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# PREFACE

FOR some years, cases regarding extraordinary prayer have often been laid before me and I have thought Christian charity entailed upon me the duty of giving my humble opinion, in spite of the difficulty of the subject. But in these lofty paths a single answer is generally not enough, and I have been asked to supplement these individual counsels by a treatise on infused Contemplation. I will say nothing more as to the origin of this work, because this is enough to indicate its spirit. It is not a theological, but a practical treatise that I have in mind, and I have avoided as far as possible anything which might give rise to controversy.

The treatise is divided into five parts.

Part I speaks of the nature and degrees of Contemplation, but only so far as to give the necessary ideas to directors for the guidance of souls. I have inserted lengthy cita-

tions from the writings of the Saints. Doubtless a few lines from an author would sometimes have been enough to prove the point at issue, yet I have believed it very useful to quote several pages. These passages, indeed, in their all-heavenly beauty if quoted in part might have stirred hearts but little to the love of God; but reproduced in their entirety, they afford souls a spiritual food well calculated to sanctify them, as Holy Church says in the prayer for St. Teresa's feast.

Part 2 shows the great trials to which souls raised to Contemplation are sooner or later subjected. It is upon this point that I have been most often consulted and consequently I have been obliged to develop it rather at length. I hope these pages, written with bruised hearts rather than written books before my eyes, will bring some comfort to the afflicted souls who read them.

The subject of Part 3 is the virtues necessary to contemplative souls. This part is of supreme importance, since the greater number of souls who are raised to Contemplation and who make only indifferent progress in it, must attribute it to the absence of solid virtues.

Part 4 treats of supernatural visions and speech. Here illusion is easy and I have been obliged to dwell at length upon the discernment of spirits.

Lastly, the subject of Part 5 is the vocation to infused Contemplation. The importance of this question is obvious: in order to reach the goal, it is not enough to run, but the running must be along the path leading to the goal.

The sources from which I have drawn are Holy Writ, the lives and writings of the Saints, and the experience gained from the numerous cases laid before me. I have avoided citing particular instances of the wonderful operation of the Holy Ghost in souls, for on this point discretion is of the highest importance.

May this humble work, composed for the spiritual good of the generous souls who have begged me for it, teach them how, having received much from God, they may render Him much in return.

I dedicate these pages to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the blessed Source of all grace, and I humbly beg Him so to vivify them that they may produce abundant fruits of sanctity.

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# PART I

## Nature and Degrees of Extraordinary Prayer

# CHAPTER I

## THERE ARE TWO KINDS OF MENTAL PRAYER: ORDINARY AND EXTRAORDINARY

THERE are two kinds of mental prayer: one, the more usual and within the power of all devout souls; the other, the lot of a few privileged souls and to be attributed less to themselves than to the Holy Ghost.

The more common form admits of methods; not so the other, though those whom God has called to it need careful direction, calculated to dispel the obstacles to grace. The first demands much work and is more or less of the nature of the labors of this world; the second is made without effort and is a foretaste of the rest to be enjoyed in Heaven.

These two kinds of prayer have received different names, which must be known if the works of the Saints and other spiritual writers are to be understood.

1. The first kind of prayer is called *ordinary* because it is made by the help of that grace which God refuses to none; the second, *extraordinary*, because it is made by means of a

special grace which God grants but to few. Just as an unfledged bird cannot rise up into the air, however much it tries, so it is impossible for the soul which has not received the gift of extraordinary prayer from the Holy Ghost to attain it by its own efforts and the help of common grace.

2. The first kind of prayer is called *natural*, and indeed, although grace raises nature to this stage, nature still preserves her characteristic way of acting. The intellect thus reflects on a spiritual in the same way as on a scientific, truth, and love of God is testified in the same way as affection towards a father or a friend.

The second kind of prayer is called *supernatural* because grace so elevates nature that the soul knows and loves in a way superior to the ordinary way of knowing and loving—so the Saints, taught by personal experience, affirm unanimously.

3. The first kind of prayer is called *active* because effort is made to gain light for the intellect and fervor for the will by means of distinct acts, demanding more or less work. As opposed to this, the second kind of prayer is called *passive* or infused, since instead of

light and love being sought in distinct acts, they are received directly from God, not however to the exclusion of the soul's cooperation. In this sense St. Dionysius says of his master Hierotheus that "he suffered divine things."[1]

4. Ordinary prayer is called *Meditation* because the truth is then sought by means of reasoning and reflection. Extraordinary prayer is called *Contemplation* because then there is no process of reasoning, but the truth is known by intuition. It is most imperative that this passive or extraordinary contemplation should be distinguished from the active or ordinary contemplation which has been spoken of in the first treatise.[2] In future when the word Contemplation is used, unless otherwise stated, passive or extraordinary contemplation is to be always understood, in accordance with the phraseology used by all the Saints and spiritual writers when treating of that kind of prayer which occupies our attention here.

In conclusion, in extraordinary prayer God sheds upon the soul such a simple knowledge and pure love as it would be impossible to

[1] *De divinis nominibus*, c. 2.
[2] *Ordinary Prayer*, Part 5, ch. 1.

gain by means of ordinary grace. The Holy Ghost effects this wonder through the gift of wisdom, which, according to St. Bonaventure, is "like a sun shining with knowledge and burning with charity." [1]

Extraordinary prayer is composed of three main divisions:

1. Supernatural Recollection, where the knowledge and love are not sufficiently intense to suspend the powers of the soul, whose action remains free.

2. Contemplation, where the superabundance of knowledge and ove ravishes, at least partially, the intellect and will.

3. Consummate union, where these powers regain full liberty of action. This change results not from the knowledge and love being any less great than in Contemplation; on the contrary, they are much more intense, but the Holy Ghost so strengthens the soul that incomparable floods of light and love could not absorb it n the slightest.

The reader must not be astonished if the same word "Contemplation" be used with two different meanings: first, as a synonym for extraordinary prayer, and later on, to

[1] *De Dono Sapientiae*, C. 4, Vol. 7, p. 639.

denote one of the three main divisions of this same kind of prayer. This is constantly done by the Saints and masters of the spiritual life in their writings, the context showing how the word " Contemplation " is to be interpreted. Such anomalies, besides, are not uncommon in spiritual books. For instance the word " prayer " is taken sometimes to mean mental prayer in general; at others, in a more particular sense, the petition for graces helpful for salvation.

## CHAPTER II

### SUPERNATURAL RECOLLECTION

Supernatural Recollection forms part of extraordinary prayer, for we cannot attain it, even in an elementary degree, by means of ordinary grace alone; the assistance of the Holy Ghost is required, shedding upon the soul the life-giving waters of wisdom, the highest of His gifts. Then the soul begins to receive direct from God the light and love which were previously obtained by distinct acts of the intellect and will, the passive replacing the active. Then, again, the soul enters on a new knowledge and love of God, found in a wonderfully simple and loving attention to God, which causes the soul to feel consumed by love. Then, finally, the soul is filled with peace, a foretaste of eternal rest.

The soul's happiness does not, however, go so far as rapture, even partial, the total or partial suspension of the powers being reserved for Contemplation, where wisdom is showered upon the soul much more abundantly. Since

the intellect, will and memory remain free, to restrain their activity would be tempting God and exposing oneself to many a distraction.

Saint Teresa says: "When God raises the soul to this prayer, then, according to the advice of certain writers, it may doubtless rest content in listening to God's voice and, without entering into any reasoning with the understanding, remain attentive to God and regard Him working within it. But unless Our Lord has caused the soul to pass from recollection to Contemplation, I cannot understand how the reasoning of the understanding can be stopped without more harm than good resulting. Yet this question has been much discussed by persons concerned with the spiritual life, some of whom hold the contrary opinion. . . . One of these referred me to a treatise of Blessed Fr. Peter of Alcantara. As I hold him a saint and know what light he had on this subject, I would willingly have submitted to his authority. But having read the book, we found that this holy man said exactly the same thing as I. His explanation, it is true, is expressed in different words, but it is clear, for he expressly says so, that the soul

should only check the reasoning of the understanding when God has raised it to a higher kind of prayer and keeps it united to Himself by love. . . . Let us be careful not to remain foolishly inactive, for all that is left to the soul which suppresses the acts of the intellect is the shame for its foolish attempt and much greater dryness; its imagination only becomes more unruly in its violent effort to think of nothing. . . . There is nothing more pleasing to God than to see us busied with the thought of His honor and glory, forgetful of our advantage and pleasure. Now, how can this forgetfulness of self exist in one who is paying so much attention to himself that he dares not stir? And how can he rejoice at God's glory and wish for its increase when he is only thinking of checking the activity of his understanding? . . . Since God has given us the powers of the soul to use and since the effort made by each has its reward, instead of holding them prisoners by a kind of enchantment, let us allow them to freely fulfil their usual function until God sees fit to confer a higher one upon them."[1]

But the contrary excess must be avoided,

[1] *Château intérieur*, 4e demeure, ch. 3, t. 3, pp. 368–371.

namely such zealous activity that the peace and sweetness due to God's loving gaze are stifled. This would be depriving the soul of a spiritual food which strengthens it in a wonderful way.

To conclude, the principle which is to govern all in this kind of prayer is, that above all, the repose which the soul enjoys in the general and loving knowledge of God must not be disturbed in any way; yet, on the other hand, the powers should not be kept inactive, since they remain free to act. So then, if the soul finds more spiritual pleasure in making only acts of the affections, let the reflections be omitted, and if it finds more fruit in God's loving look alone, let it omit not only the reflections, but even the distinct affections.

The soul then feels consumed with love, in the midst of an undefined view of its Creator. Let it not lament the loss of the spiritual fruit previously gained by distinct considerations and affections, for all that is written in books, however sublime, of the Divine attributes pales before what the soul understands and experiences in God Himself. As to the will, it loves the one and only good, including in itself all other good, and yet this

one act of general love includes much more than all the other distinct acts of the affections which it could make. Supernatural Recollection is the vestibule of Contemplation.

## CHAPTER III

### DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SUPERNATURAL RECOLLECTION AND AFFECTIVE PRAYER

It seems at first as though there would be no difference between Supernatural Recollection and Affective Prayer, and indeed there are three characteristics common to both: a pure, sweet love of God, the numerous affections which accompany such love, and the absence of fatigue.

And yet these two kinds of prayer are essentially distinct, especially in the four following points:

1. In Supernatural Recollection, the pure sweet love of God is poured upon the soul by the Holy Ghost. It belongs, then, to the *passive order*. In Affective Prayer, this love is acquired by more or less numerous acts made by the intellect and the will, aided by the Holy Ghost. It belongs thus to the *active order*.

2. The special grace of Affective Prayer does not go so far as to enable the soul to make essentially new acts, but allows it to make

with ease and wonderful sweetness, acts of the affections already made. The grace of Supernatural Recollection is entirely different, for it raises the soul to essentially new forms of activity, which St. Bernard calls angelic rather than human.

3. In Supernatural Recollection there is no essential beyond an indistinct yet loving view of God, in which the soul feels consumed with love: the distinct reflections and affections which sometimes occur are supplementary. A comparison will make this clearer: When the day is drawing to a close, we are obliged to light the lamps, but the powerful light of the sun, reflected in the vast expanse of the heavens, still surpasses these artificial lights. In the same way, in Supernatural Recollection there is sometimes need to have recourse to repeated reflections and affections in order to banish distractions, but these are only supplementary and accessory acts, above which lies the pure sky of a general and loving attention to God. Manifold acts of the affections, on the other hand, are the very essence of Affective Prayer.

4. In Supernatural Recollection the soul enjoys so profound a peace and so sweet a joy

that it feels it has found true happiness. There is nothing of this in Affective Prayer. Here the soul enjoys an exceptional happiness and rest, it is true, but at the same time it feels that in this method there will always be something to be desired.

The part played by Supernatural Recollection in extraordinary prayer is considerable. In the first place, it is the first sure sign by which it may be recognized that a soul is called to contemplation and should in future hold a more elevated converse with God. It is, too, the method of prayer usual among contemplative souls: they cannot long maintain the heights of contemplation and are forced to return to a more modest kind of prayer.

## CHAPTER IV

### FIRST CHARACTERISTIC OF CONTEMPLATION: FAITH IS RENDERED PERFECT IN IT BY THE GIFT OF WISDOM, WHICH THE HOLY GHOST SHOWERS UPON THE SOUL

"We see now through a glass in a dark manner, but then face to face," [1] says the Apostle. In Contemplation the mirror, that is, the spiritual image by means of which we know God here below, does not disappear and give place to the sight of Him face to face, but His image becomes much more perfect. The enigma, that is, the obscurity of faith, does not cease to exist, but the light becomes more intense. Since the image and obscurity remain, this knowledge too remains a knowledge of faith; but since the image is more perfect and the light more intense, it is a more elevated kind of faith.

This elevation of faith is due to the gift of wisdom, the highest of the gifts of the Holy Ghost. However, the degree of wisdom common to all souls in a state of grace, is not

[1] 1 Cor. 13: 12.

sufficient to perfect faith in this wonderful way. A more eminent degree is required, which God grants to certain privileged souls, called contemplatives.

Let us listen to what St. Thomas says: "The contemplation which renders faith useless is that of glory. Thanks to this contemplation, supernatural truth is seen in its essence. Neither the Angels before their confirmation in grace, nor man before he had committed sin had this power of contemplation; and yet their contemplation was more elevated in nature than ours. By its means they approached nearer to God and were able to understand more clearly than we, God's doings and the mysteries connected with Him. Their faith, then, was not like that by means of which we seek for God, for He was more nearly present to them than to us by virtue of the light of wisdom." [1]

This faith, which belongs to the state of innocence, did not disappear entirely after the Fall, but became the heritage of those souls who are called by a special favor to Contemplation.

It is by means of this faith, thus wonder-

[1] $2^a$ $2^{ae}$, q. 5, a. 1, ad 1.

fully illuminated by the gift of wisdom, that uneducated men, such as St. Paschal Baylon,[1] have been able to answer the most difficult theological questions and even to write admirably on theology. It was this faith that, in the case of St. Ignatius, shed such vivid light on the divine mysteries that he felt ready to lay down his life in their defense.[2]

St. John of the Cross has devoted the twelfth stanza of his *Spiritual Canticles* to a description of the excellence of this kind of faith, which is, as it were, a thin veil through which the greatness and infinite beauty of the Creator may be seen: "Faith," he says, "is become so illuminated and transparent that some of the wonderful traits of God's greatness may be perceived. . . . The soul experiences an absorbing desire to be united to its spouse, and having recognized the absolute powerlessness of creatures to help it to this end, it has recourse to faith, which alone can throw true light on its Beloved, choosing faith as the means by which it may attain this blessed union. . . . The soul expresses its consuming desire in verses whose meaning is: O faith of Jesus Christ, my Spouse, thou art the

[1] *Breviary*, 17 May. [2] *Ibid.*, 31 July.

possessor of truth in this dark life. Reveal to me those truths relating to my Beloved which thou hast placed in my soul, but veiled by thy mysterious shades. Ah! if, instead of imparting them to me in a vague and hidden manner, thou wouldst but show them to me in all the brightness and entirety of their perfection! Thou art the veil which covers them. Would to God that thou mightest be withdrawn and I be allowed to contemplate and possess them in the full and perfect manifestation of glory! . . . How to imagine the burning desire, the intense pain which tortures the soul when, about to enjoy its Sovereign Good, that Good is taken from it? The nearer we see the object of our desires the more it seems adapted to our grasp, the more cruel and unbearable the anguish which we experience when that object is denied to us." [1]

Yes, faith perfected in wisdom becomes sometimes so illuminated that the soul can do nothing but languish in the desire of seeing the transparent veil, which separates it from God, withdrawn.

" In a word, how do you think, Theotimus,"

[1] *Cantiques Spirituels*, str. 12, t. 4, pp. 120, 121, 122, 130.

says St. Francis of Sales, " that the soul which has once tasted a divine consolation to the full, can live in this world surrounded by so many miseries without experiencing almost perpetual pain and languor? That wonderful servant of God, Francis Xavier, was often heard raising his voice to Heaven, when he thought he was quite alone: ' Alas, Lord, do not, I beg, overwhelm me by such a flood of consolation, or, if in Thy infinite bounty Thou wishest to thus surround me with delight, take me to Paradise, for he who has once tasted Thy sweetness in his soul, must live in bitterness when he is not enjoying Thee.' " [1]

Such, too, was the interior martyrdom endured by St. Teresa, when she cried: " I live but rapt out of myself. I await such high life in God that I am dying for not dying." [2]

[1] *Amour de Dieu*, 1. 6, ch. 15, t. 4, p. 361—Tursellinus, *Vita S. Fr. Xav.*, 1. 6, c. 5.

[2] *Cantique*, t. 2, p. 569.

## CHAPTER V

### SECOND CHARACTERISTIC OF CONTEMPLATION: IT IS THE SOUL'S SIMPLE AND LOVING GAZE UPON GOD

CONTEMPLATION is not made by reasoning, that is, by a sequence of judgments deduced one from the other: it is that simple gaze of the intelligence which is called intuition. "Contemplation," says St. Thomas, "belongs to the simple intuition of truth." [1]

Let us try to explain this second characteristic by a comparison, though a very imperfect one. An artist goes by night to the Vatican to study Raphael's "Transfiguration." As he has only a feeble light, he spends several hours in moving the lamp from one part to another, so as to make its light fall at one time on Our Lord's face and His garments, at another on Moses and Elias. But directly morning has come and the sun's rays light up the room, he sees immediately at a glance what he has seen piece by piece and by successive examinations.

[1] $2^a$ $2^{ae}$, *q.* 188, art. 3, ad 1.

In the same way, he who meditates on God's infinite perfection considers in turn His Almighty Wisdom, Power, Justice, Mercy and so on. But when a ray of God's Wisdom comes from heaven, all is instantly changed. Meditation gives place to Contemplation, and intuition, which comprises all the preceding considerations in an eminent degree, takes the place of reasoning.

In Contemplation, the general view of God is confused, it is true, for God is only seen as a Being incomprehensible in His nature, Whose wisdom is unfathomable in its depths, Whose excellence is inaccessible in its heights, Whose charity is without bounds, Whose eternity is without limit, Whose essence is at once infinitely clear and obscure, and about which, the more one knows, the more one understands that there still remains infinitely more to know.[1] But this in no way detracts from the preeminence of Contemplation over Meditation. The confused view that results from looking at the sea gives a much better idea of the power of its waters than the distinct view of the rivers flowing into it. It is

[1] Cf. Alvarez de Paz, I. 5, p. 3, c. 1. Moguntiæ, 1619, t. 3. p. 1754.

the same in prayer: the confused view of God's perfection, as obtained from Contemplation, gives a much higher idea of His infinite excellence than the distinct view of His attributes gained from Meditation.

Contemplation is, then, in the first place, a simple and prolonged gaze upon God; it is also and always a loving gaze, that is, the soul's spiritual eye is fixed on its divine Object not only because of its infinite beauty, but also on account of the love with which this Object inflames it. See this little child, so attractive by reason of its charming face. Its mother spends hours looking at it, doubtless because of the beauty of its features, but also and more especially, because she loves it. So it is with the soul and God in Contemplation.

"The sensitive or intellectual appetite," says St. Thomas, "is moved to consider an object sometimes on account of the love felt for the object itself, as St. Matthew says: 'Where thy treasure is, there is thy heart also;'[1] sometimes on account of the love of knowledge itself, which results from the consideration. It is for this reason that St.

[1] 2 Matth. 6: 21.

Gregory places the contemplative life in charity, in the sense that the love of God produces the burning desire of contemplating His beauty."

Later on, the holy Doctor comes back to the same idea, saying: "Although the seat of the contemplative life is essentially the intellect, it has, however, its origin in the affection in the sense that one is moved by charity to contemplate God." [1]

In short, in infused Contemplation the Holy Ghost never sheds light upon the intellect without also enkindling the fire of love in the will, with the result that one is never satiated with gazing upon God, not only on account of His inexpressible beauty, but also because the love one bears Him stirs one to contemplate Him. If, then, in prayer, the knowledge of God is not, as it were, ingulfed in an ocean of love and consequently all inflamed with charity, there may still be lights of great value for instructing the soul and for directing it in the way of perfection, but on the other hand there is nothing of inspired Contemplation about it.

[1] $2^a$ $2^{ae}$, *q.* 180, a. 7, ad 1.

## CHAPTER VI

### THIRD CHARACTERISTIC OF CONTEMPLATION: THE SOUL THERE LEARNS TO KNOW GOD BY EXPERIENCE, BY MEANS OF THE FIVE SPIRITUAL SENSES RENDERED WONDERFULLY PERFECT BY THE GIFT OF WISDOM

In the treatise on *Ordinary Prayer*,[1] it has been seen that, in addition to the five external senses and the five internal senses of the imagination, the soul also possesses five spiritual senses. These latter are nothing but the intellect and the will learning to know and enjoy the spiritual in a way akin to that in which the senses of the body learn to know and enjoy the material.

The same gift of wisdom, besides marvellously perfecting faith and charity in Contemplation, raises the spiritual senses until it allows them to learn to know God by experience.

But what is to be understood precisely by this experimental knowledge? St. Bonaventure thus explains it: "Even though all man-

[1] *Ordinary Prayer*, Part 5, c. 3.

kind told me that such a thing is sweet, I should not gain an experimental knowledge of it, whatever proofs might be brought forward, but I could only form an opinion about it, or believe it, or know about it. But if my taste touches some object or is touched by it, then I have an experimental knowledge of it. It is the same with the internal taste and other spiritual senses. If I read or hear it said that the Lord is sweet, I have not in consequence an experimental knowledge, unless my spiritual taste be affected by the divine sweetness and I can say with the spouse: His fruit is sweet to my mouth." [1]

The question of the experimental knowledge of God is most important in the study of Contemplation, and therefore it is necessary to prove its existence. Reason, evidently, teaches nothing on this point. As to Holy Writ, it is true that it speaks of the spiritual senses, as for instance when it says: "O taste and see that the Lord is sweet;" [2] but this agreeableness is also met in marked consolation of the usual order, and no con-

[1] *De septem itineribus æternitatis*, De sexto itinere, dist. 1. t. 8, p. 464.

[2] Ps. 33: 9.

clusion can be drawn with reference to the subject here under discussion. We must have recourse to the experience of the Saints.

St. Augustine says in his *Confessions:* "What is it I love, O my God, when I love Thee? It is not corporal beauty, nor the dazzling light which charms our eyes, nor the sweet varied tones of music, not the delightful odor of flowers, perfumes, or spices, nor manna, nor honey, nor an attractive form. . . . And yet when I love my God, I love a light, a voice, an odor, a food, an embrace which takes place within my soul. There, shines a light which space cannot limit; there, re-echoes a ceaseless melody; there, arises an odor which no wind can disperse; there, I taste the savor of a food which no appetite can diminish; there, I possess that of which not even satiety can dispel the charms. That is what I love when I love God." [1]

In the first account of her states of prayer to Father Rodrigue Alvarez, St. Teresa says: "The first kind of supernatural prayer which I experienced in my own case was an interior recollection caused by the soul's seeming to possess, interiorly, new senses, not unlike the

[1] *Confessions*, I. 10, ch. 6.

exterior ones. It tries, seemingly, to get rid of the trouble caused by these exterior senses and the soul thus gains the victory over them, and sometimes even draws them after her. Its delight is to close the eyes and ears of the body so as to see and hear only that with which it is occupied, namely to treat with God in privacy." [1]

Then, passing to a more elevated though imperfect degree of Supernatural Prayer, the Saint describes the senses of smell and touch in the following words:

" The soul breathes an indescribably sweet odor, as if in the depths there was a brazier on which perfumes of the finest quality were being thrown. Neither the light of the fire nor its position is seen, it is true; but the whole soul is filled with the warmth of this scent-laden air and often, as I have said, the body, too, shares the same sensation. Do not imagine, however, that one feels the warmth and breathes the scent; it is something much more delicate and I only use these terms to render the ideas more intelligible." [2]

Later on the Saint rises much higher and de-

[1] *Lettres*, Vol. 1, p. 379.
[2] *Château intérieur*, 4e demeure, ch. 2, t. 3, pp. 361, 362.

scribes the spiritual sense of sight, hearing and touch in a most elevated way. Such transports are confined to those souls only who have arrived at the highest point of Contemplation: "Often when the soul least expects it and even when it is not thinking of God, Our Lord suddenly rouses it by a flash of lightning, as it were. Yet it perceives no light and hears no noise, but it most clearly understands that its God is calling it. So overcome is the soul by the sound of that Voice, especially in the beginning, that it trembles and moans, although suffering no pain. It feels that it has suffered an indescribably sweet wound, although ignorant of its author or its manner. So precious is this wound in the eyes of the soul that it never wishes to be cured of it. . . . In this pain it tastes an incomparably greater pleasure than the exquisite rapture of the prayer of quiet in which there is no mixture of suffering." [1]

Finally, St. John of the Cross, when speaking of the highest form of Contemplation, thus describes spiritual taste, sight and touch: "This sublime and loving knowledge of God is the characteristic of the unitive state, being

[1] *Château intérieur*, 6e demeure, ch. 2, t. 3, pp. 429, 430.

in fact, the union itself and consisting in God's mysteriously touching the soul's very depths. It is God Himself that the soul feels and tastes, but not, of course, as fully and as clearly as in the light of the beatific vision. The devil cannot meddle with a favor at once so elevated and so profound. It is not within his power to bring about anything of this kind, nor to shed such pleasures and delights upon the soul, for these lights procure the joy of a feeble and rapid glance upon God's essence and life eternal. . . . Some of these lights and touches, by means of which God reaches the soul, enrich it in a wonderful way. One of them is enough to remove in an instant certain imperfections from the soul which it had not been able to get rid of by its own efforts during life and in addition, to leave it adorned with virtue and overwhelmed with supernatural gifts. One such rapturous consolation can reward the soul for all the sufferings of its life, even were they without number. Then, endowed with indomitable courage and a passionate desire to suffer for its God, the soul endures the extraordinary torture of not being able to suffer more." [1]

[1] *Montée du Carmel*, l. 2, Ch. 26, t. 2, pp. 319, 320, 321.

In imperfect Contemplation, experimental knowledge is most often gained by the one spiritual sense of taste alone, God being known by the sweetness of His love.[1]

Now the difference which exists between the ordinary and extraordinary use of the five senses is clear.

In ordinary prayer the soul acquires by means of acts of the intellect and will, analogous to sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch, an excellent devotion, at one and the same time sweet and strong, calm and fervent.

In Contemplation the soul receives direct from the Holy Ghost, by means of these spiritual senses perfected by wisdom, such a perfect experimental knowledge of God that no other method could attain the same end.

This excellent knowledge gained by the spiritual senses, especially by the sweetness and touch of God's love, never, however, takes the place of faith, but only adds to it. Faith always holds the first place, and the knowledge it gives is of far more dignity and certainty.

[1] Suarez, *De Oratione*, t. 14, p. 186, n. 36.

## CHAPTER VII

### FOURTH CHARACTERISTIC OF CONTEMPLATION: THE SOUL FEELS NO FATIGUE, BUT IN PROFOUND PEACE DRINKS DEEP OF THE LIVING WATERS OF WISDOM AND LOVE

MEDITATION is made by means of acts of the intellect and will, with the help of the ordinary grace which God refuses to none; here then the soul is at work and feels fatigue. In Contemplation, on the contrary, the Holy Ghost sheds light and love upon the soul, which has only to accept them humbly and gratefully. Here the soul neither works nor experiences fatigue.

St. Teresa explains this by the metaphor of a gardener whose garden needs water: the mystic garden in which virtue blooms is the soul; the gardener, he who prays. In Meditation, the gardener draws water by means of his bodily strength and consequently becomes wearied. In the contrary case of Contemplation, the gardener has only to receive the water which falls from heaven and no fatigue results.

St. Francis of Sales draws another comparison from the *Canticle of Canticles:* "Eat, O friends, and drink and be inebriated, my dearly beloved.[1] In all these divine mysteries which comprise all others," says the Saint, "there is indeed enough to eat and drink for all the dear friends, and to inebriate the very dear friends. . . . Now to eat is to meditate, for in Meditation the spiritual meat is masticated by the teeth of consideration, the crumbling, crushing and digesting being accomplished with some difficulty. To drink is to contemplate, and this is done without difficulty or resistance, but rather with pleasure and readiness, while to be inebriated is to contemplate so often and so ardently that one is carried out of oneself to be entirely in God."[2]

St. John of the Cross says: "As soon as the soul places itself in the presence of God, it enters into the possession of that profound peace where it drinks deep of the living waters of wisdom and love, without having to bring the water in the aqueducts of considerations, comparisons and figures. In this way the

[1] Cant. 5, 1.
[2] *Amour de Dieu*, l. 6, c. 6, t. 4, p. 324.

man suffering from a burning thirst quenches it without effort beside the clear stream." [1]

St. Teresa addressing these souls which are no longer beginners, but have attained the most sublime degree of Contemplation possible in this life, says: "There Our Lord enriches the soul with His Gifts and Lights, at the same time surrounding it with such profound peace and perfect silence, that it reminds me of the building of Solomon's temple, where no noise was allowed. This seventh dwelling may also be called the temple of God, where God and the soul enjoy each other in profound silence. . . . It is here, in my opinion, that God grants its request by giving it the supreme pledge of His love. Here is the source of living waters of which the wounded hind drinks deep and quenches her thirst. Here is God's tabernacle where this well-beloved soul tastes indescribable delights. In a word, it is here that, like the dove which Noe sent from the Ark to see if the waters of the flood had abated, the soul has found the olive branch and by showing it announced that dry land had been found in the midst of the waves and storms

[1] *Montée du Carmel*, l. 2, ch. 14, t. 2, pp. 196, 198.

of the world. . . . I assure you, my daughters, however, that these souls are not without their cross, but it does not disquiet them in the least nor in any way disturb their peace. The cross passes away like a wave or slight storm, and calm is immediately restored because the presence of their adorable Spouse makes them forget all else. May He be blessed and praised by all creatures. Amen." [1]

[1] *Château intérieur*, 7e demeure, ch. 3, t. 3, pp. 549, 551, 552.

## CHAPTER VIII

### FIFTH CHARACTERISTIC OF CONTEMPLATION: THE POWERS OF THE SOUL ARE SUSPENDED BY ADMIRATION AND LOVE

GREAT orators arouse and hold the attention; masters of eloquence go even further and carry their listeners out of themselves to such an extent that they forget everything else and can no longer do anything but listen to words which charm and enkindle them. Somewhat the same thing takes place in Contemplation, but of an immeasurably higher nature. The soul, ravished in God, forgets all created things, becomes incapable of coming back on self and is absorbed by the sole occupation of learning to know God with admiration and to love Him. "Contemplation," says the author of the *Ladder of the Cloistered*, "is the elevation of the soul, which, being suspended in God, tastes the joys of everlasting sweetness." [1] Complete suspension takes place only in perfect Contemplation, for in imperfect Con-

[1] This work, formerly attributed to St. Bernard, is by Guigues, Prior of the Grande Chartreuse, who was much praised by St. Bernard and Peter the Venerable.

templation the soul is not entirely absorbed in God and consequently is still undergoing the trial of distractions.

St. Teresa, who is constantly speaking of the suspension of the soul's powers, is always careful to distinguish between partial and total suspension. In the fourteenth chapter of her *Life*, when speaking of the prayer of the quiet, belonging to imperfect Contemplation, where the suspension is only partial, St. Teresa teaches us by means of a graceful metaphor how the will is suspended and sunk in God, while the understanding and the memory, which remain free, go and seek their food elsewhere, like the doves:

"Without knowing how it becomes captive, the will simply gives God its consent to His imprisoning it, sure of being fettered by Him it loves. . . . The understanding and memory come to the assistance of the will so that it may become more capable of enjoying so great a good. Yet sometimes this co-operation only serves to disturb the will in this intimate union with God. In such a case the will, without being troubled by their importunity, should seek to maintain the pleasure and profound calm which it enjoys.

To try to fix these two powers is to be led astray with them. They are then like doves which, not content with the food their master gives them without any work on their part, go to seek other food elsewhere, but finding their quest useless, hasten to return to their dovecot. These two powers, besides, come and go, in the hope that the will will make them partakers of its enjoyment. If the Lord accords them a small part of this heavenly food, they stop; if not, they go off again to seek elsewhere. So credulous are they, that they flatter themselves they are rendering a service to the will by laying its happiness before it, but often they are doing it an injury." [1]

Further on, in the eighteenth chapter, the Saint speaks of the prayer of union belonging to perfect Contemplation, and thus describes the total suspension of the powers which is characteristic of this kind of prayer: "All the soul's powers lose their natural activity and are so suspended that they have not the slightest knowledge of their own operations. If one has been previously meditating on some mystery, it becomes effaced from the memory

[1] *Vie par elle-même*, ch. 14, t. 1, p. 149.

as completely as if it had never existed. If one has been reading, all remembrance of the matter disappears and the mind can no longer be fixed upon it. It is the same with vocal prayers. The memory, like a persistent butterfly, here finds its wings burnt and can no longer flit hither and thither. The will is doubtless engaged in loving, but without understanding how it loves. As to the understanding, if it understands, it does so in an unknown manner and it cannot comprehend what it understands. . . . That is a mystery where I lose myself." [1]

The total or partial suspension of the powers is, as we have seen, the characteristic of Contemplation and distinguishes it from Supernatural Recollection.

[1] *Vie par elle-même*, ch. 10, t. 1, pp. 195, 196.

## CHAPTER IX

### SIXTH CHARACTERISTIC OF CONTEMPLATION: IT IS THE BEGINNING OF EVERLASTING BEATITUDE

THIS is the common teaching of the Saints. We will cite some as witnesses. St. Gregory says: "The contemplative life begins here on earth, to be completed in the heavenly home, for the fire of love which begins to burn on this earth will be more ardently enkindled when God Himself, the object of that love, is seen face to face." [1]

St. Thomas says: "Now the contemplation of the divine truth is imperfect, for it is effected by means of a mirror and an enigma and consequently in Contemplation we are forestalling, as it were, the eternal beatitude which begins here below, to be completed in the life to come." [2]

St. Bonaventure writes: [3] "The contemplative life begins on earth and becomes perfected in our heavenly home. Love indeed is a fire

[1] *Hom. XIV. super Ezech.*, post med., Paris, 1571, t. 2, p. 141.
[2] $2^{a}$ $2^{ae}$, q. 180, a. 4, in corp.
[3] *De Dono Sapientiæ*, cap. 4, in fine, t. 7, p. 639 and 340.

which begins to burn in this life and which will become more inflamed once it has seen its divine object. The works of the active life, says St. Gregory in his *Morals*, come to an end with the body, but the joys of the contemplative life become greater at the moment of death. At that moment they will not be lessened, but will last forever. That is what the Psalmist says: 'Better is one day in Thy courts above thousands.'[1] In this seventh day, whose end shall be marked by no evening, the contemplative soul indeed finds eternal rest in the Spirit which has shed upon it His seven gifts, saying with the Psalmist: 'This is my rest for ever and ever; here will I dwell, for I have chosen it.'"[2]

St. Teresa, when speaking of a soul which is entering upon the way of Contemplation, says: "The soul takes flight and gradually rises above its misery, and God gives it some knowledge of the happiness of everlasting glory."[3] I have chosen this from among the numerous testimonies borne by the Saint, as it shows that even the first stages of Contemplation savor of life eternal.

[1] Ps. 83: 11. [2] Ps. 131: 14.

[3] *Vie par elle-même*, ch. 14, p. 150.

And lastly, St. John of the Cross who, on the contrary, was elevated to the highest degree of Contemplation, says: "I am tempted to believe that at the moment of the awakening which puts the soul in possession of this delightful sight, God, so to speak, draws aside from the separating veils, so that more facility may be given for seeing what He is. Then this adorable Face, shining with grace and beauty, allows the rays to appear and just be seen. I say just be seen, as all the veils have not entirely disappeared, since that of faith is never torn in this life." [1]

Besides, in order to be better convinced of the truth of this point, it suffices to contrast the different characteristics of eternal happiness and Contemplation. In Contemplation, it is true that God is always seen by means of a mirror, in an enigma, while in Heaven, He is seen face to face, this constituting an essential difference. The analogy is, however, sufficient for us to be able to say with much truth: Contemplation is the foretaste of the eternal happiness of the Saints. Let us examine this statement in detail.

[1] *Vive flamme d'amour*, strophe 4, vers 1, t. 4, p. 629.

In the first place the essential object of knowledge and love in eternal beatitude is God, Creator and sovereign Lord of all things. It is the same in Contemplation.

In the second place, the Vision of eternal beatitude is an act of the intellect, unique and everlasting,[1] where that which God sees in Himself is the subject of Contemplation, that is, the infinite fulness of His Wisdom, Power, Beauty, Goodness, Being, Life—in a word, all Perfection. The knowledge of God in Contemplation is a simple, prolonged act of the understanding, comprising in an eminent degree in its simplicity all that the varied consideration of the Divine Perfections would teach us.

In the third place, love in eternal beatitude is a unique and eternal act of the will, comprising in its eminent simplicity all the perfections claimed by its object, which is God. This love thus includes complacency insatiable of praise, a boundless benevolence, and almost infinite respect. In Contemplation, love is a simple and prolonged act comprising in an eminent degree praise, benevolence, zeal for God's glory, conformity to His

[1] St. Thomas, $1^{a}$ $2^{ae}$, q. 3, a. 2, ad. 4.

Will, and the respect and gratitude due to His Divine Majesty.

In the fourth place, the peace of eternal beatitude is infinite in its depths, immutable in its permanency, eternal in its length; while, in Contemplation, the soul enjoys a peace whose depth, extent and constancy surpass all feeling.

In the fifth place, the joy of eternal beatitude is such that no idea of it can be formed on earth, in accordance with the words of St. Paul: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man what things God hath prepared for them that love Him."[1] The heavenly joy tasted in Contemplation is so great that no tongue could explain it to those who have not experienced it.

Lastly, in the sixth place, in eternal beatitude knowledge, love, peace and joy are showered upon the soul by the Holy Ghost, while in Contemplation the soul has only to receive these same infused graces without work or fatigue.

[1] 1 Cor. 2 : 9.

## CHAPTER X

### DEFINITION OF CONTEMPLATION

In consequence of what has just been said, Contemplation may be defined as: "A simple and loving gazing upon God, where the soul, suspended as the result of the admiration and love it feels, learns to know God experimentally and in profound peace enjoys the beginning of eternal beatitude."

To take these different points in turn.

1. *A Simple and Loving Gazing upon God*

The soul's spiritual gaze is simple, in that it is an act of faith wonderfully elevated by wisdom and consequently made without reasoning. It is loving, because the soul does not only contemplate God on account of His indescribable beauty, but also on account of the love which it bears Him. Hence there is a twofold difference between Contemplation and Meditation: in the latter, reasoning is employed; while in the former, there is no reasoning. Again, in Meditation the knowledge of God is sometimes unaccom-

panied by any warmth, whilst in Contemplation it is always surrounded by love.

### 2. *The Soul is Suspended as the Result of the Admiration and Love It Feels*

The suspension of its powers is total in perfect, partial in imperfect, Contemplation. This it is which constitutes the essential difference between Contemplation and Supernatural Recollection, where the powers remain quite free.

### 3. *The Soul Learns to Love God Experimentally*

Just as we learn to know colors, sounds, scents, and in general, the properties of bodies experimentally by means of the senses of the body; in the same way, by means of the spiritual senses, wonderfully perfected by wisdom, we learn to know God by experience. This way of learning to know God by means of the ineffable sweetness of Divine love, as honey is known by its sweetness, is much more perfect, noble and delightful than a knowledge gained by a series of arguments. It rests upon faith, which always keeps the first place in the order of knowledge and which,

as regards its essence, is common both to Contemplation and Meditation.

### 4. *The Soul Enjoys Profound Peace*

In Contemplation, at least when it is perfect, the soul forgets all things relating to this earth—the cause of a thousand cares and worries—to attach itself to God alone, in Whom it finds a home of undisturbed rest.

### 5. *The Soul Enjoys a Beginning of Eternal Beatitude*

This foretaste essentially differs from the beatitude itself, for there is an abyss between seeing God face to face and contemplating Him in a picture. Yet so great is the delight, that those souls who have experienced it cry aloud spontaneously: "If this happiness were to last always, this would no longer be earth, but Heaven!"

## CHAPTER XI

### DIFFERENCE BETWEEN INFUSED CONTEMPLATION AND THE ACTIVE CONTEMPLATION OF ST. IGNATIUS'S EXERCISES

First as to their definitions: infused Contemplation when reduced to what is essential may be defined as: "The soul's simple gaze upon God, accompanied by admiration and love and the suspension of its powers;" while the active Contemplation of St. Ignatius's *Exercises* is: "A peaceful work accompanied by the understanding, giving birth in the soul to admiration and love of God and His works."

These two kinds of prayer differ in the five following points:

1. *Difference of work.* The knowledge and the love of God in infused Contemplation are showered upon the soul by the Holy Ghost and being thus exempt from work, it belongs to the *passive order*. In the active Contemplation of the *Exercises*, the knowledge and love are produced by repeated acts of the intellect and will. This is of the *active order* then and is always accompanied by more or less tiring work.

2. *Difference of simplicity.* The intellect knows God by intuition alone in infused Contemplation, while in the active Contemplation of the *Exercises*, on the contrary, there are always distinct acts of reflection and reasoning. It is the same with the will; in the former, there is but one affection, as the result of which the heart loves a Good including all good; in the latter, on the contrary, the affections are always manifold.

3. *Difference of light in the intellect and warmth in the will.* Everything, however sublime, that is contained in books, everything, however profound, that reflection teaches of the Divine attributes, pales indeed before that which the soul, raised to infused Contemplation, understands in its simple and general view of its Creator. As regards the will, its sole act of general love fires it much more than all the other separate acts of the affections that it could make. This difference arises from the gift of wisdom at once dazzling with light and glowing with love, perfecting the faith and charity of passive Contemplation to a wonderful extent. This is not so in the active Contemplation of the *Exercises*.

And all this, without detracting from the

intrinsic perfection and merit of the acts of faith and charity, which can be more perfect and more meritorious in active than in passive Contemplation. Here I am speaking only of the increase of light and heat.

4. *Difference in the liberty of the soul's powers.* In infused Contemplation, admiration and love suspend, at least partially, the intellect and the will; while in active Contemplation, on the contrary, admiration and love never go so far as to check the liberty of these powers.

5. *Difference of preparation.* The acts of active Contemplation may always be produced with more or less facility by the help of the grace which God refuses to no one. It is equally possible with practice to succeed in making them more readily and easily. With infused Contemplation it is different, for the acts characteristic of it cannot possibly be made without the assistance of a grace which is God's entirely free gift to those to whom He wills to give it.

A real likeness between these two kinds of Contemplation must, however, be recognized; in both are found, though in very different degrees, peace, tranquillity, rest of the soul,

admiration and love of God and His works. From this Suarez concluded that the active Contemplation of the *Exercises* of St. Ignatius is excellent of its kind, the reason he gives being that an ordinary mental prayer is more perfect in proportion as it more nearly approaches its type, infused Contemplation.[1] We are entirely of his opinion, but without prejudice to the other methods of *active* prayer taught by the Saints.

[1] Suarez, *De oratione*, 1, 2, c. 11, N. 10, t. 14, p. 168, and *De religione Soc. Jesu*, 1, 9, c. 6, Nn. 9 and 11, t. 16, pp. 1039, 1040.

## CHAPTER XII

### HOW THERE ARE TWO KINDS OF CONTEMPLATION, ONE PERFECT AND THE OTHER IMPERFECT

THERE are four main distinctions between perfect and imperfect Contemplation:

1. In imperfect Contemplation, the powers of the soul are not completely suspended in God and consequently can still turn more or less to different objects. For instance, the soul may revert to itself and examine what is taking place within it, it may entertain pious thoughts of which God is not the immediate object, or may even think of non-religious subjects, in other words, have distractions which must be banished. On the other hand, in perfect Contemplation the suspension of the powers is complete, and in consequence it is impossible for the soul to revert to itself and to have any other thought, even a pious one, which might distract it from God.

2. The soul, in imperfect Contemplation, is united to God in a wonderful way, but not so as to transform it, while in perfect Con-

templation, on the contrary, the soul is transformed in God.

By means of a well-known comparison, an attempt may be made to gain some idea of this transformation: bring water close to a fire and it is heated, but never transformed into fire; on the contrary, plunge a piece of iron into a furnace and it soon becomes filled with the light and heat of the fire and, without ceasing to be iron, it is, as it were, transformed into fire. This is a feeble image of the soul in perfect Contemplation when, plunged in the Divinity which fills it with warmth and heat, it is as if transformed in God without losing its nature. Our Lord, when speaking to St. Teresa of perfect Contemplation, says: "The soul is entirely consumed, My daughter, so as to be more deeply immersed in Me; it is no longer the soul which lives, but I who live in it: as it cannot understand what it hears, it is hearing and yet not hearing." [1]

St. Bernard explains this doctrine with a master's touch in a passage celebrated for its beauty: "When, then, shall my soul, elated with divine love, forgetful of and

[1] *Vie par elle-même*, ch. 18, t. 1, p. 195.

despising itself as a useless vessel, soar up to God, unite itself to Him and having become but one spirit with Him, say: My flesh and my heart have failed! God of my heart and my portion forever! Blessed and holy do I call him to whom it has been granted to experience something similar in this mortal life, even once, secretly and for a single instant! To be so carried away that one's existence seems to have ceased, to be no longer conscious of self, but, as it were, destroyed and annihilated, this is the result of a heavenly intercourse and not of human affection. . . . O pure and holy love! O sweet and fragrant affection! O union purified and freed from all earthly attraction! by so much the more pure and free, as it is without any admixture of self-love; by so much the more fragrant and sweet, as all savors of the Divine; to reach this stage is to become God-like. Just as a tiny drop of water poured into a large quantity of wine seems to disappear, taking the taste and color of the wine; as iron when plunged into the furnace seems to lose its nature and become in all respects like fire; and as the air which is penetrated by the light of the sun is transformed into light

itself, so that it seems to give rather than receive light; so it is with those holy people in whom all human affection becomes assimilated in some indescribable way and changed into the will of God." [1]

3. Imperfect Contemplation is the beginning of angelic speech, but perfect Contemplation goes much farther and makes one the rival of Angels.

During this mortal life we cannot produce acts of the intellect without the help of images which accompany the acts, as a shadow follows the body.[2] The Angels, on the contrary, make no use of images; hence a Contemplation is more angelic in proportion as the soul is freed from the assistance of the imagination.

In imperfect Contemplation, the images used are few; the soul departs from its human method of acting, to begin to speak in an angelic way. In perfect Contemplation, the soul makes no use of images, but holds converse with God in the same way as the Angels.

Listen to what St. Bernard says: [3] "May my soul die, if one may so speak, the death of

[1] *De diligendo Deo*, c. 10, initio.
[2] St. Gregory of Nazianzen, *Oratio 2 de theologia.*
[3] *Sermo 52 in Cant.*, circa med.

the Angels, so that by losing the remembrance of things present, it may strip itself not only of the attraction to things inferior and corporeal, but still further, of their images. May it thus hold pure co munion with those whose rival it is by reason of its purity. Contemplation, it seems to me, consists entirely or for the most part in such rapture. For not to be hindered during life by the attraction of earthly things is the character of human virtue, but to be free from bodily images while meditating is the result of angelic purity.

" Both one and the other are a grace from God, both are ecstasies in which one is carried out of oneself, but in the former, far away, and in the other, near. Happy is the one who can say: ' I have gone far off, flying away, and I abode in the wilderness.'[1] He was not satisfied with having gone out of himself, but has been far from himself, so as to be able to rest. You have risen above the seductions of the flesh in such a way as to be delivered from its lusts and no longer hindered by its charms. Here there is progress and separation, but you are not yet removed to a distance as long as you have

[1] Ps. 54 : 8.

not freed yourself, by purity of spirit, from bodily images which take you on all sides. Do not promise yourself rest yet. You are mistaken if you think you will find lower than this the place of rest, the secret of solitude, the serenity of light, the dwelling-place of peace. But give me someone who has reached this stage and I will not hesitate to admit that he is at rest and can say with truth: 'Turn, O my soul, into thy rest, for the Lord hath been bountiful to thee!'"[1]

4. Imperfect Contemplation may last for a considerable time, whilst perfect Contemplation is always of very short duration. St. Teresa says that at first perfect Contemplation never lasted more than the time of a *Hail Mary*[2] in her case and that she never knew it to last more than half an hour.[3]

This short duration, however, does not prevent the effects of perfect Contemplation from being much greater than those of imperfect Contemplation, for the soul's sanctification depends less on the duration of the grace than on its penetrating effects, as is seen in the case of the Apostles on the day of Pentecost.

[1] Ps. 114 : 7. [2] *Vie par elle-même*, ch. 4, p. 37.
[3] *Ibid.*, ch. 18, p. 194.

## CHAPTER XIII

### FIRST DEGREE OF IMPERFECT CONTEMPLATION: PRAYER OF QUIET

MYSTICAL writers include rather a large number of degrees in imperfect Contemplation. I limit myself to the following: the *prayer of quiet* and *spiritual intoxication*. This is enough for direction in the majority of cases. Let us take the *prayer of quiet* first.

It is so called because its characteristic is a profound peace, filled with sweetness, which arises in the depths of the soul and extends to all its powers and at times overflows upon the senses.

Since all the powers are not entirely suspended, the soul is still able to produce some distinct affections, but it should only make such as it feels impelled to by grace, and further, it ought to proceed with such calmness and gentleness as in no way to disturb the delightful rest to which it has been led by the Holy Ghost.

Listen to what St. Teresa says: "In this prayer of quiet the soul should proceed with

gentleness and without commotion. By commotion I mean the search made by the intellect for thoughts and considerations in thanksgiving for this benefit, and the confused accumulation of one's sins and faults one upon the other in proof of the soul's unworthiness. All this picture becomes stirred up in the soul, the mind depicts it and memory torments you with it. In my own case, at least, there are times when these two powers tire me immensely and although my memory is weak I cannot check it. The will must then persist in its repose, understanding that no good is effected with God by means of violence; it would be like throwing great logs of wood on the spark which will most likely be extinguished by them.

"When convinced of this truth, let the soul say with humility: 'Lord, what good can I do here? What relation is there between a slave and his master, between earth and heaven?' or other words which arise spontaneously. Above all, let the soul feel the truth of what it says and not be made uneasy by the intellect, which is only a disturber of its peace. Often while the intellect is straying, the will finds itself in this union

with God and enjoys it in profound peace. As it would be useless to try to fix the intellect and so share the happiness with it, the will will do better to leave it to its digressions and continue to enjoy this interior pleasure, at the same time keeping recollected like the prudent bee. For if the bees all went in pursuit of each other instead of some remaining in the hive, how would the honey be made? . . . Seeing ourselves so close to Our Lord we ought to beg graces, pray for the Church, for those who have recommended themselves to our prayers, for the souls in Purgatory, and all this without the noise of words, but with the keen desire of being heard. Such a prayer comprises much and obtains much more than all the considerations possible to the intellect."[1]

St. Jane Frances de Chantal also speaks of the prayer of quiet in the following terms: " My mind, as regards its acuteness, remains in the simplest concord, but is not united, for when it wants to make acts of union, as it does only too often on certain occasions, it feels the effort and clearly perceives that it cannot unite itself, but can only remain united.

[1] *Vie par elle-même*, ch. 15, t. 1, pp. 161, 162.

The soul would not wish to stir beyond that, does not even think of it and does nothing but force more profoundly and yet most imperceptibly into its depths the desire that God may do with it and all creatures and all things what He pleases. The soul would make no other exercise but this for the morning, Holy Mass, preparation for Holy Communion and thanksgiving for all blessings. Lastly in all things it would wish only to remain in this simple unity of spirit with God, without looking beyond, and in this state sometimes to say the *Our Father* for everyone, for individuals and for itself, without diverting its glance in any way, nor considering why or for whom it is praying. Often, according to the occasion and the necessity or the unsought affection which comes to it, the soul melts away in this unity." [1]

The repose cannot be permanent with souls raised to the grace of infused Contemplation. " There are certain souls," says St. Teresa, " who, when they have arrived at the prayer of quiet and have begun to enjoy its delights, imagine that it is very well to enjoy it always,

[1] *Lettre à saint François de Sales*, 29 Juin, 1621, Plon, 1877, t, 4, p. 550.

but I beg of them, as I have done elsewhere, not to entertain that idea. This life is long and to endure its trials with perfection we need to consider how Jesus Christ, our Divine Model, bore those with which He saw Himself overwhelmed." [1]

The usual prayer of these souls is Supernatural Recollection, joyous or sorrowful according as God manifests Himself to the soul, making it feel the indescribable tenderness of His Love or reproving it for its faults; giving it a foretaste of heaven or making it realize the sadness of its exile. In general the Recollection is accompanied by sadness, for, since the soul has many faults, it is in a state of purification, which must of necessity be painful. But even then the Recollection always brings a vigorous love and profound peace to the soul. These souls are also tried by spiritual aridity, which is necessary to keep them humble and make them understand from experience how incapable they are of raising themselves by their own efforts to any supernatural state.

[1] *Château intérieur*, 6e demeure, ch. 7, t. 3, p. 487.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE OTHER DEGREE OF IMPERFECT CONTEMPLATION: SPIRITUAL INTOXICATION

This kind of prayer is much less frequent with contemplative souls than the Prayer of Quiet. This chapter, however, will be devoted to it, so as to prevent the illusions which easily arise in it.

Spiritual Intoxication is such fervent devotion of love that the soul can hold it in only with difficulty. St. Teresa describes it as follows: "An effusion of praise in God's honor, but irregular, unless the Lord Himself puts it in order, for the intellect is, to say the least, useless in that respect. The soul, carried out of itself, excited by the sweetness of its transports, longs to raise its voice in hymns of praise. The flowers have already half opened their calix and begun to spread their perfume. Here the soul would wish to be seen by all creatures in order to make known His glory to them, so as to be able to unite with them and offer God their praise in concert. It longs to share with them a happi-

ness beneath the weight of which it sinks. . . . It would wish to possess a thousand tongues with which to praise the Lord. It utters a thousand holy follies, but which go straight to the mark, charming Him Who has brought this about. . . . A soul when in this state sees clearly that the Martyrs did scarcely anything of themselves in supporting their torments, since this unswerving courage came to them from another source. But then, what suffering when the soul, awakened from its ecstasy, sees itself condemned to live on in this world, under the sad law of cares." [1]

In this kind of prayer, the powers are not entirely suspended and consequently the intellect and the will can still act. Hence reason must regulate the fervor of devotion, or the soul is only dispensed from this in the one case of perfect Contemplation, where God substitutes His infinite Wisdom for the human reason buried in Him.

The control exercised by the reason ought, in the first place, to have the effect of preventing this overflowing joy from appearing in public: when one does not feel master of one's exterior actions, one ought to seek pri-

[1] *Vie par elle-même*, ch. 16, pp. 172, 173.

vacy. Further it ought, even in private, to regulate the actions of the body so as to preserve to them all fitting propriety. Do not let it be said that this fervor, as it comes from the Holy Ghost, is perfect in all its manifestations. When God gives an abundance of food to the body, does He not always give the charge to the soul of moderating the use of it, in accordance with the rules of temperance? In the same way, when He lavishly grants the heavenly wine which intoxicates, He leaves the care and duty of moderating its fire to reason.

## CHAPTER XV

### FIRST DEGREE OF PERFECT CONTEMPLATION: SIMPLE UNION

THERE are two degrees of perfect Contemplation: *simple union* and *ecstatic union* or *spiritual betrothal.* Let us begin by *simple union.*

It is characterized by the four properties of perfect Contemplation of which we have spoken:[1] the total suspension of the soul's powers, its transformation in God, intercourse with God after the manner of the Angels, and short duration Nothing more; the body does not lose its sensibility as in ecstasy.

St. Teresa describes its wonderful fruits of sanctity as follows:

Having called to mind by means of a graceful comparison how the silkworm, wrapped in its cocoon, as it were in its tomb, dies and is there transformed into a beautiful white butterfly, the saint passes from the metaphor to the reality and thus continues: "Let us see now what this mystical worm becomes

[1] See ch. 12.

once it has ceased to live, for it is with the intention of arriving at this point that I have been speaking up to the present. Scarcely has it made its entry into this elevated species of prayer before it dies entirely to the world and is transformed into a beautiful white butterfly. O wonder of the Divine Power! And who could worthily depict the state of a soul which has seen itself so closely united to God, and, as it were, buried in His greatness even for a short space! For this time, to my mind, never lasts a half hour. I tell you, indeed, that this soul no longer knows itself. There is as much difference between what it was and what it is, as between the ugly worm and the white butterfly. This soul has no knowledge of how it has merited such a great happiness, or rather, whence it has come, for it sees clearly that it was not in the least deserved. It feels a consuming desire to praise God and suffer for Him a thousand deaths, if that were possible, and at the same time a burning thirst arises within it to endure heavy crosses for its Beloved. It burns with a desire of doing penance and an incredible love for retirement and solitude. In short, the soul so ardently wishes that God

may be known and loved by all men, that it cannot endure to see Him offended without feeling intense pain. . . . Wings have been given to it. How, being able to fly, could it be satisfied with going step by step? All that the soul does for God in this new state seems nothing in comparison with what it would like to do. . . .

"The soul ardently desires to leave this world, which disgusts it, and if anything can soften the hardships of its exile, it is the thought that it is detained here by God's Will. . . . This suffering causes the soul to shed copious tears each time it turns to prayer. This weeping no doubt arises from the interior martyrdom which the soul endures in seeing that God is so seriously offended instead of being honored as He should be, and that so many unbelievers and heretics are lost. What afflicts it more than anything else is the loss of Christian souls. Doubtless, the soul knows that, since God's mercy is infinite, these souls may be converted and saved in spite of their irregular life and yet it still fears that many are to be damned. O wonderful effect of God's grace! Only a few years or, may be, days ago, this soul thought

only of itself. Who then has given it these lively and noble feelings which could not be acquired by many years of meditation, however carefully made? How then, some one will say, if I give all my attention for several years to the consideration of what an evil sin is; that those who are lost are children of God and my brethren; that being surrounded by so many dangers in this unhappy life, it is best for us to quit it; will these considerations not be enough to procure me such feelings? No, my daughters, they are not enough. The sorrow experienced by he soul which is elevated to this ntimate union with God is very different from that which we can excite in ourselves by our own efforts. By means of long meditation it is within our power, I admit, to experience a certain suffering, but it is far from equalling that wh ch is experienced in the state of which I am speaking. This latter penetrates our heart and seems to tear and bruise our soul without any co-operation on our own part and often even against our will. What is this suffering, and what is its cause? I will tell you, my Sisters. Remember these words of the Spouse in the Canticle . . .: ' The Lord brought me into

the cellar of wine and has in a holy manner inebriated me with His love.' [1] That is exactly what happens here." [2]

Union is a rare favor especially to souls who have only just entered upon perfect Contemplation. "There are some souls," says St. Teresa, "who after they have been raised by Our Lord to perfect Contemplation always want to remain in that state, but that is impossible. . . . In the beginning, after the first time, one year or even many years may elapse before He again grants us this favor." [3]

The usual method of prayer is therefore Supernatural Recollection, sometimes joyful, sometimes sorrowful, but more perfect than in the case of those souls who have not gone beyond imperfect Contemplation.

It is not unusual with such souls for the Recollection to be raised to a very intimate union of the will with God, while the understanding and the memory remain quite free in their action. This favor is most often granted to apostolic men, such as St. Francis Borgia, who, were they more transported,

[1] Cant. 2 : 4.
[2] *Château intérieur*, 5[e] demeure, ch. 2, pp. 392–397.
[3] *Ibid.*, 6[e] demeure, ch. 7, pp. 482, 484.

could not fittingly exercise their office. Here is what St. Teresa says on this subject: "It sometimes and even often happens that the soul clearly understands that its will alone is united to God, at least so it seems to it, and that this power only is occupied with Him without being able to turn to any other object, whilst the two other powers, of the understanding and the memory, remain free to act and work in God's service. In a word, Martha and Mary go together. Being extremely surprised to experience this, I asked Fr. Francis Borgia if it was not an illusion. He told me no, and that it often happened to him." [1]

Lastly, these souls have their times of spiritual dryness, which are necessary to make them understand their weakness and thus keep them humble.

[1] *Lettre au père Rodrigue Alvarez*, t. 1, p. 380.

## CHAPTER XVI

### SECOND DEGREE OF PERFECT CONTEMPLATION: ECSTATIC UNION OR SPIRITUAL BETROTHAL

Ecstatic Union differs from Simple Union in that not only the powers of the soul are then suspended, but the external senses also lose activity. Thus one no longer sees, hears or feels. Ecstatic Union is, as it were, the entrance hall to the consummated union or spiritual marriage, for ecstasies are interviews between God and the soul, which is there fired by a love strong as death, and where the soul finds the courage to persevere in the midst of the great trials through which it must pass in order to arrive at this Divine marriage. When the ecstasy is brought about instantly, instead of gradually, it is called Rapture.

The Saints who have treated of this matter from their own experience, say that in ecstasy the soul is, so to speak, separated from the body. This expression is very correct since the body becomes insensible and so, dead, as it were, and consequently separated from the soul.

They say too that in ecstasy the soul is separated from the spirit, understanding by the word soul the inferior, and by the word spirit, the superior part, in accordance with the language of Holy Writ: "For the word of God is living and effectual and more piercing than any two-edged sword: and reaching unto the division of the soul and the spirit.[1] This expression is again quite correct, for the soul in ecstasy holds converse with God after the manner of the angels, that is, by means of its intellect and will alone, while the imagination and sensitive appetite being deprived of all activity are, as it were, dead and consequently as if separated from the spirit.

In ecstasy and Rapture the knowledge of God is not only confused, as formerly, but usually clouded and yet so marvellous that it produces a regard for God which infinitely surpasses all other regards, such an ardent love that one would lay down one's life a thousand times to fulfil God's least desire.

We see in Holy Writ that God surrounded Himself with darkness when He wished to give a high idea of His infinite greatness, which no intellect could understand. Thus He

[1] Heb. 4 : 12.

spoke to Moses and Job from the midst of darkness and on the day of the dedication of the Temple, a cloud filled the Lord's house, so that Solomon cried out: "The Lord said that He would dwell in a cloud." [1]

Something similar but of a much higher nature takes place in Ecstasy.

Let us hear what the Saints say: "The soul," says St. Teresa, "knows that it only wishes its God, but it loves nothing in particular in Him. It loves all that there is in Him but does not know what it loves." [2]

"I very often see God in darkness," says Blessed Angela of Foligno, "and in this Good which can neither be conceived nor expressed, in this most certain Good, which appears to me only encompassed with darkness, is placed all my hope. In seeing It I possess all that I want; in It I see all good. . . . My soul sees nothing of which it can speak, nothing even which can be conceived, and, in seeing nothing I yet see all things. This Good is the more certain the more it is obscured and it exceeds all things in proportion as it appears more in darkness and more hidden. . . . God has

[1] Exod. 19 : 9; 3 Kings 8 : 12.
[2] *Vie par elle-même*, ch. 20, p. 320.

given me frequent and indescribable proofs of friendship. He has spoken the sweetest and tenderest words to me, He has overwhelmed me with graces and benefits; but all these favors are small in comparison with the Good which I see in this deep obscurity." [1]

The obscurity of the Divine Vision is not, however, always continuous in Ecstasy. Just as when the sky is clouded, the clouds part and let the blue sky be seen, so in Ecstasy God at times dispels the encircling darkness to disclose to the soul such exalted wonders of His Divinity that no tongue can repeat them.

God then wishes to arouse in the soul an ever-increasing desire of the Consummated Union, where the obscurity will permanently disappear, in so far, at least, as the state of faith allows in which one always remains here on earth.

"Although God then seems a long way off," says St. Teresa, "yet He often discloses His sovereign Greatness in such a wonderful way that it surpasses all our conceptions. Words, too, are wanting to ex-

[1] *Vie écrite par le frère Arnauld*, ch. 4, Bollandistes t. 1, p. 197, nn. 172, 174.

press it and it is necessary, in my opinion, to have experienced it, to understand and believe it. The end of such lofty intercourse is not to console, but to show the soul how justly it is distressed at seeing itself separated from the presence of a Good which includes within Itself all other goods." [1]

Nor is this all: In Ecstasy God sometimes discloses not only something of the unfathomable depths of His Divinity, but also, in a secondary way, the marvels of His Omnipotence in the Court of Heaven.

St. Alphonsus Rodriguez describes one of these Raptures in which the soul contemplates some of the secrets of Heaven in the following passage, speaking of himself in the third person: "As he had retired to his room to meditate upon Our Lady's Death and Assumption and to consider the number of Angels who assisted at it, he saw how Our Lady's most holy soul was transported to Heaven at the moment of her death, accompanied by a numerous band of rejoicing Angels, and how, on her arrival, the heavens opened to receive their Queen. He followed them in spirit and was never separated from them, so that he saw

[1] *Vie par elle-même*, ch. 20, t. 1, p. 218.

the Angels enter Heaven with their precious treasure. This was the first feast that the Angels kept in honor of God's Mother after she had left the earth.

" A second feast immediately followed, for when the Mother of God had entered Heaven accompanied by this band of Angels, she was greeted by another countless multitude of heavenly spirits who were waiting for her as their Queen and Sovereign. What a reception that was, what feasts and rejoicing the Angels made in her honor! These things cannot be described, for they are the feasts of Heaven given by its blissful inhabitants to their Sovereign Lady, the Mother of God Himself, and they can be better realized and understood in spirit when God communicates them to the soul in Rapture (for I believe this person was out of his senses) than they can be related. It is impossible for man to justly describe them, for he is corporal and these feasts are spiritual.

" A third feast more solemn than the previous ones took place when the most Holy Virgin, after this glorious reception, was again transported by the Angels and presented to the Blessed Trinity. Then the joy and happi-

ness of all the inhabitants of Heaven were so great that they all united in one great concert, after the manner of spirits and not as men.

" This person saw the feast as though he had been present at it, rejoicing to find himself in company with the Angels and partaking of their joy. The intellects of all men taken together would not suffice to understand how it was done, for this feast in no way resembled that which is given in honor of earthly kings. Although there were countless Angels, although their place of dwelling was immense, although they were so scattered, each one enjoyed the heavenly concert and partook of the spiritual joy of the feast as if they had formed but one. And this person enjoyed it much, for he was in the midst of them. He saw them all at a glance, how they rejoiced and feasted in their Sovereign Lady's honor.

" He also distinguished each one of these blessed spirits individually, as if his soul had been wholly and entirely at one and the same moment in each one and in all and he enjoyed to the full, without losing the least pleasure, the solemn feast held in honor of our Virgin Queen. . . . As the Contemplation of these

things took place in Heaven, evidently he was transported and there was nothing corporeal about it, but all was purely spiritual. He does not remember how long the Rapture lasted."[1]

Ecstasy is exposed to more than one illusion. First, the devil may act upon the body, taking from it all the power of sensation. Those present, seeing the body become insensible, believe it is an Ecstasy, while in reality it is nothing but the devil's act. "When then," says St. Francis of Sales, "you see a person who has Raptures during prayer, as the result of which he starts out of himself and rises above himself to God and yet has no Ecstasy in his life, in other words, does not lead a noble life of attachment to God by denying worldly desires, mortifying his will and natural inclinations by interior gentleness, simplicity and humility, and above all, by continual charity, you may be sure, Theotimus, that all his raptures are very doubtful and dangerous. They are Raptures calculated to win men's admiration, but not to sanctify them. For what good can it do a soul to be transported to God in

[1] *Vie de saint Alphonse Rodriguez par lui-même*, pp. 8–11, Rétaux, 1890.

prayer if in its conversation and life it is transported by worldly, base and natural affections? To be above oneself in prayer and lower than oneself in life and act, to be an angel in Meditation and an animal in Conversation, is to hop from side to side, to swear by God and by Melchon; in a word it is a sure sign that such Raptures and Ecstasies are only the amusements and tricks of the evil spirit." [1]

Weakness arising from a sickly constitution, when the slightest thing causes a swoon, may be the second cause of illusion. A supernatural grace even of a very inferior order, which would only slightly affect a robust constitution, produces so great an effect upon such a nature that a fainting fit follows. One might be mistaken and believe it an Ecstasy. In order to judge correctly, remember the two following remarks:

A true Ecstasy usually lasts but very little time, while this false Ecstasy, on the contrary, lasts hours. In the former, the powers are dead to all created things, but alive, beyond all description, to God and things divine. On the other hand, in cases of fainting, the powers

[1] *Amour de Dieu*, 1 : 7, ch. 7, t. 5, p. 30.

are benumbed and receive no impression, neither of creatures nor of God Himself. When it has been proved that in a certain person's case Ecstasies are only fainting-fits, every possible means must be taken to put a stop to them.

Souls raised to Ecstatic Union are not exempt from dryness, this trial being necessary to keep them in humility and to help them to purify their intention. But God almost always leaves them the feeling of the entire conformity between their will and that of God. This feeling has no longer any sweetness, it is true, and therefore fear, weariness, sadness and repugnance still continue, but it wonderfully strengthens the will, and the soul should esteem it greatly. Let not the soul lose sight of this precious conformity, but make use of it in union with Our Lord, Who, being sad even unto death, said: "Father, not My will but Thine be done!"

Listen again to what St. Teresa says: "This is the state in which my soul chances to find itself at rare intervals: for three, four or even five days, fervor, visions, in a word all blessings are not only taken away, but become so wiped from my memory that even

when I try I cannot remember the least blessing that I have received. All seems to me a dream, in so far, at least, that I cannot remember anything; my bodily sufferings overwhelm me all at once; my spirit is troubled, I can entertain no thought of God, and I do not, in a way, know under what law I am living. If I read, I understand nothing of what I read. I see myself full of imperfections and without courage to acquire virtue. The great courage which I usually possess so entirely disappears that I should be unable to resist the least temptation, it seems to me, or any word that was spoken against me. The thought then comes to me that I am no good for anything and that it was a mistake to raise me out of the beaten track. The thought that I am deceiving all those who have a good opinion of me, saddens me, and I would like to go and hide myself somewhere where no one would see me. It is not virtue that then makes me long for solitude, but cowardice. Finally, I feel inclined to abuse all those who would contradict me. But in the midst of this struggle God grants me this grace: the thought that I am not offending Him more than usual. Far from asking Him to deliver

me from this torment, I am ready to endure it until the end of my life and I accept it with all my heart. My only prayer is that He may sustain me by His strength, so as not to offend Him in anything. Lastly, I consider it a very great grace that He grants me, not to leave me always in such a state." [1]

[1] *Account given to St. Peter of Alcantara, Lettres de sainte Thérèse*, t. I, pp. 10, 11.

## CHAPTER XVII

### CONSUMMATED UNION OR SPIRITUAL MARRIAGE

CONSUMMATED UNION differs from Contemplation in four points:

1. The darkness which exists in the preceding degrees disappears, giving place to a clear vision of God, as far, of course, as the obscurity of faith, which ceases to exist only in Heaven, will allow. God is always seen in image, but this entirely spiritual image sometimes reaches such perfection that the unity of Nature and the distinction of Persons in the mystery of the Blessed Trinity is clearly seen. No Angel could effect such a wonder, but only God's Omnipotence, without the intervention of any creature.

2. The powers of the soul are no longer suspended and the senses of the body preserve their liberty and activity. From which it results that he who has received this signal grace can converse with men, doing so as the Guardian Angels, whom the sight of God face to face does not prevent from assisting the souls that are entrusted to them.

And rising higher, in this Divine state the soul is the living, admirable, image of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Who while on earth enjoyed the Beatific Vision and yet taught His well-beloved Apostles and conversed familiarly with them.

3. The union of the soul with God is no longer transitory, as in the preceding degrees, but permanent: everywhere and always the soul feels God dwelling within it and treating it with unheard-of familiarity. From time to time He rouses it by such loving peace and sweetness that no tongue can express its feelings, while He sometimes wounds it spiritually very deeply but quite painlessly.

And here the question may arise whether, in the case of souls who have reached this sublime state, the permanence of the union is so great that they are confirmed in grace. The Saints are not unanimous on this point, but in practice the question becomes simplified, for God usually adds to the first benefit of Consummated Union, a second favor, that of a distinct revelation of salvation. So these souls are sure of going to Heaven, if not in virtue of Consummated Union, at least on account of revelation.

St. John of the Cross thus pictures the delightful death of these privileged souls: "The death of these persons is accompanied by wonderful sweetness, far surpassing all that they have ever experienced in the whole of their spiritual life. They die in a state of Rapture wonderful to behold, and of the sweetest attacks of love, like the swan, whose song is sweetest when it is about to die. This it is that made David say that the death of the just man is precious in the sight of God. Floods of love then burst from the soul to be lost in the Divine Ocean of Love. There in their extent and power they seem seas." [1]

4. The passions are entirely subject to the reason, and the reason to God. Divine Wisdom, from time to time, permits their revolt, it is true, so as to remind the soul of what it owes to grace and thus to keep it humble. But these rebellions are short. The soul quells them and watches the tempest rage beneath it.

These chosen ones of God are not, however, exempt from suffering. It could not be otherwise, for Our Lord, who was raised to the Beatific Vision, was at the same time the Man of Sorrows. But their suffering is accompa-

[1] *Vive flamme d'amour*, strophe 1, vers 6, t. 4, p. 478.

nied by so much peace and such entire submission to God's Will that the suffering may be said to have lost its sting.

St. Teresa describes this state, which is quite Divine, as follows: " Whether it be in Prayer of Union or in Ecstasy, Our Lord unites the soul to Himself, by rendering it blind and speechless, like St. Paul at the moment of his conversion. He so entirely deprives it of all feeling that it can understand neither the nature of the favor which it enjoys, nor how it enjoys it, since the excessive pleasure it experiences in seeing itself so close to God suspends all its powers. Here, God's action is different. In His Goodness, He makes the scales fall from the eyes of the soul in His wish that by a way, which is in truth most extraordinary, it should discover and understand something of the graces with which He deigns to honor it. Having admitted it into His own dwelling place, He accords it an intellectual vision of the highest order. By representing the truth in a particular way, the Three Persons of the Most Holy Trinity are shown to it. By reason of the wonderful power of perception which is then granted to it, it sees the Three Persons

distinct one from the other and yet understands with supreme truth that They all Three are but one and the same Substance, Power, Wisdom and God. So that what we know in this world by the light of faith, the soul by reason of this light understands from what, as we may say, it has seen. . . . There the Three Adorable Persons are communicated to the soul, speaking with it and giving it to understand Our Lord's words in the Gospel: 'If any man love Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him and We will come to him and will make Our abode with him.'[1]

"After the soul of which I have spoken has received this favor, its amazement grows daily, for it seems that these three Divine Persons have never left it. It sees clearly, in the way stated before, that the three Divine Persons are within its soul, in its very depths and, as it were, in a profound abyss. . . . Perhaps it seems to you, my daughters, that when the soul is in this state it ought to be so absorbed that it can give its attention to nothing else. You are mistaken. It turns more easily and more ardently than formerly to all which concerns God's service and as soon

[1] John 14 : 23.

as it is freed from occupations it remains in this pleasant company. God will never, in my opinion, fail to give the soul this intimate and manifest sight of His presence, if it remains faithful to Him." [1]

" Do not imagine, my Sisters, that the souls which are united to God by the bonds of this Spiritual Marriage always feel the effects of this sublime favor to such a high degree as this. It is only most usually so, as I have mentioned when it has occurred to me to do so. Our Lord sometimes leaves them in their ordinary state and it seems to them that then all the venomous animals which are in the neighborhood of the castle or in the castle itself, unite together to avenge themselves on these souls for the time when they were unable to attack them. It is true that this state of things does not last for more than a day and this great trouble, usually brought about by some unexpected incident, makes the soul realize how much it gains by living in the company of its God. Strengthened by its Divine Spouse, the soul not only remains firm in its good resolutions and faithful to all which concerns His service, but feels more than ever determined to serve

[1] *Château intérieur*, 7e demeure, ch. 1, t. 3, pp. 530, 531, 532.

Him, without even being overcome by a first movement. This trial, as I have just said, is sent only at rare intervals. Our Lord's wish in sending it is first, that the sight of their own nothingness may always keep these souls humble; and secondly, that the knowledge of what they owe Him and the sublimity of the favor with which He honors them, may oblige them to praise Him more and more." [1]

This state of Spiritual Marriage is the highest to which one can attain on earth. This does not mean, however, that all the souls who attain to it are more perfect than the canonized Saints who have not. Sanctity of state does not indeed always bring about an equal proportion of personal sanctity. It is a matter of faith, for instance, that the state of virginity is more perfect than the married state, and yet there are married women who are more holy than those in a state of virginity. So let not souls raised to so sublime a state rest there as if they had arrived at their goal, which is Heaven; but let them exert themselves to make progress in sanctity, in the same way as the dawn grows to mid-day in a cloudless sky.

[1] *Château intérieur*, 7e demeure, ch. 4, t. 3, pp. 553, 554.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE WOUNDS CAUSED BY LOVE

THE wounds caused by love are not the same in nature as visions and revelations, which do not of themselves make us holy.[1]

These wounds form part of Contemplative Graces which increase the sanctity of the soul receiving them. They are very powerful in inflaming the heart with a love of wonderful purity and ardor, and ought to be much esteemed. Divine Goodness grants them in general only to those souls who have attained to perfect Contemplation and so it is fitting that they should be spoken of here.

The wound caused by love is essentially spiritual, that is, it is always felt in the higher part of the soul. In reality it is a sublime kind of spiritual touch of which mention has been made before.[2]

Most often, this wound is made only in the spirit, but sometimes the body too is wounded. This latter is generally effected by an Angel, as in the case of St. Francis' sacred stigmata

[1] See Part 4, ch. 1. [2] See Part 1, Ch. 6.

which were imprinted by a Seraph, and the pain which results becomes more intense in proportion as the interior joy increases. At length, a thrice blessed moment arrives when all the soul's suffering disappears and one seems to have found perfect happiness, although the body endures fearful torment. God wishes by this means to show His infinite Power, which can make a soul unspeakably happy amid the ocean of bodily suffering in which it is plunged.

" Then," says St. John of the Cross, " the more intense the delight and the force of love causing the interior wound, the greater too the suffering of the external wound; one grows in proportion to the other . . . O immense Greatness, which showest Thyself omnipotent in all that Thou dost! Who, O Lord, if not Thou, could fill with sweetness in the midst of bitterness; with joys, in the midst of torments." [1]

The wound in St. Teresa's heart, the feast of which is celebrated on August 27, was both spiritual and corporal. The corporal wound is venerated in the monastery of Albe where

[1] *Vive flamme d'amour*, strophe 2, vers 2, Œuvres, t. 4, pp. 499, 500.

the upper part of the heart seems pierced horizontally. The Saint describes the mysterious mixture of joy and suffering which accompanies the wound in these terms: "Close beside me on my left I saw an Angel under a bodily form. . . . He was not tall, but small and very beautiful. It was evident from his face all aglow with light, that he was one of the spirits of a very high choir, who are apparently only fire and love, and this one was apparently one of those called cherubim. . . . In this Angel's hand I saw a long golden dart, the point of which was of iron, tipped with fire. From time to time he thrust it through my heart, right down to my entrails, which it seemed to me he removed when withdrawing the dart and left me all inflamed with love of God. The pain of this wound was so sharp that it forced from me the faint moans of which I spoke but now. Yet this indescribable martyrdom made me experience at the same time the sweetest joys. Besides, I could neither wish it to cease nor find any happiness outside of my God. It is not a corporal, but entirely spiritual suffering, although the body does not cease to partake of it to a great degree. An intercourse of love

then exists between the soul and God, so delightful that it is impossible to describe it." [1]

In this wound caused by love, the suffering is seen not only to have been bodily, but more especially spiritual. This arose from the fact that the Saint's soul was not entirely cleansed of its numerous imperfections, which more or less impede the arrow of the Holy Ghost. St. Teresa was then forty-four years of age. Seventeen years later, when God had entirely purified her by the purgatory which she describes in the twentieth chapter of her life, the dart of love met no obstacle and the spiritual wound, for the future free from suffering, became the source of delights of such heavenly sweetness that no tongue could describe them.

The Saint thus describes it under the name of the Penetrating Touch: "If it happens that they (the souls raised to the grace of Spiritual Marriage) are not attentive to the presence of their Divine Spouse, He Himself rouses them and they see quite clearly that this intimate transport (I know not what other name to give it) arises from the interior of the

[1] *Vie par elle-même*, ch. 29, pp. 360, 361.

soul like those impetuous transports of which we have spoken. This outburst so full of sweetness proceeds neither from the spirit nor the memory nor from anything to which the soul lends the slightest cooperation. The soul feels it so often that it very easily notices it. . . . All pain that could be endured here below would be still, to my mind, too generously rewarded by these so sweet and penetrating touches of His love." [1]

St. John of the Cross pictures the perfect wound caused by love in somewhat different terms: " The soul experiences somewhat the same sensation as if a grain of mustard almost imperceptible, but yet endowed with great properties and burning power, had been placed in the very depths of the spirit which has been wounded. The substance and force of the grain are then secretly spread through all the soul's spiritual veins with all the power and ardor which it contains. Its love increases, develops and becomes so inflamed that it seems to see within it seas of fire filling it throughout with love. . . . Few souls, indeed, reach such high perfection, but yet some are found. They are especially those whose vir-

[1] *Château intérieur*, 7[e] demeure, ch. 3, p. 548.

tue and spirit must be perpetuated to the spiritual children who are to succeed them." [1]

The souls favored by this wound of love in such a high degree are in reality extremely rare, but yet in the Church, the Spouse of Jesus Christ, there will always be souls wounded in a wonderful way by the Holy Ghost, whose prayers are exceptionally powerful with God. The spiritual wound of love in such souls follows the course which we have just described: it begins by a mixture of joy and suffering; then the pain caused by imperfections gradually diminishes until it disappears, while delight increases. As regards the bodily sufferings which sometimes accompany the spiritual wound, they generally increase. These souls have a positive need of direction and support, especially in the beginning.

The wound of love is always accompanied by exceptional virtue. What then must be thought of a pious person who has exteriorly the stigmata and no extraordinary degree of virtue? It would be a contradiction of what the Saints tell us of themselves or of others and consequently such a favor is to be mistrusted, since its author may be the devil.

[1] *Vive flamme d'amour*, strophe 2, vers 2, t. 4, pp. 497, 498.

## CHAPTER XIX

### GOD'S WORKS MAY BE THE OBJECT OF INFUSED CONTEMPLATION

It sometimes happens during Contemplation that the Holy Ghost sheds a precious light upon the soul with regard to Our Lord's life, the meaning of a verse of Scripture, in a word, on some revealed truth. Such knowledge is an entirely free gift which the Divine Goodness grants as and where it wills.

More usually, however, the contemplative soul enjoys only a general, loving view of God, when, in undisturbed peace, it drinks long draughts of the living waters of wisdom and love. Yet from time to time a new light does not fail to rise upon a mystery, as for instance on Our Lord's Nativity. God and the mystery are then seen in the same light of wisdom which, like a sun shining with knowledge and bathed in love, shows the soul how admirable is the Creator of all things and His work, and how worthy of being loved. This elevated way of learning to know the mysteries of faith in admiration and love admits of two degrees of perfection.

In the first, wisdom discovers nothing new to the understanding, but gently recalls to the memory truths already learnt in previous reading and meditation. St. Jane Frances de Chantal mentions this in a question put to St. Francis of Sales: "I do not want to forget this, because I have often been troubled about it. All preachers and all good books teach that one should consider and meditate upon Our Lord's benefits to man, His Greatness, our Redemption, especially when Holy Church places them before us. Yet the soul, which is in the above state, cannot do so in any way in spite of the will to make the effort and is often troubled on this account. But still it seems to do so in a very good way by simply recalling or picturing the mystery with much tenderness, and with sweet and attractive affections." [1]

The second degree is much superior; not only does the sweet and warm light of wisdom illumine what was already known, but the Holy Ghost further discovers wonderful secrets which were unknown. As to cooperation with this grace, the soul at first only responds by admiration and silence, allowing time for

[1] *Œuvres*, Plon, 1845, t. 2, p. 45.

this new knowledge to become imprinted upon the understanding. Afterwards it praises God for the incomparable beauty of His works and having enjoyed both affective and effective love, it surrenders itself to Him Who has enraptured it.

Formerly, when the soul succeeded by means of reason or reflection in discovering by its own effort something which made it know its subject a little more, it found pleasure and spiritual profit in it. Now that a new light has risen, that which it could learn by means of a reasoned discourse seems very poor in comparison with what it sees and feels. It feels no attraction for the old method.

There is, however, one point on which infused light is as a rule insufficient: that of the details of practical resolutions. God does not usually disclose to a contemplative soul in a direct way all the means which it must take to correct its faults and to acquire the virtues which it lacks. He leaves it to act itself by reflection and reasoning.

Serious attention must be given to this both during prayer and at other times, when the grace of Contemplation has disappeared for a time.

This excellent way of learning to know Our Lord's life and the sayings of Scripture is present in all degrees of extraordinary prayer, from Supernatural Recollection to Consummated Union, but not in the same perfectness. The knowledge is by so much the more perfect as the corresponding prayer is of a higher degree. St. Ignatius, in a letter to St. Francis Borgia, points out how most precious light with regard to the respect due to Holy Church and those who rule her is shed upon the soul raised to perfect Contemplation. His words are: "The happiest and most beatific (method of prayer) in this life, that which leads directly to, and is immediately connected with, life eternal is the method adopted by those who closely embrace those holy gifts of which I have spoken and who are closely united to them. By these gifts I mean those which it is not within our power to possess just when we wish, but which are only granted by the Giver of all good things and Whose Almighty Power surpasses every gift: such, for instance, with reference to the Divine Majesty, as an intense faith, hope and charity . . . elevation of spirit, Divine impressions and illuminations and all other spiritual

pleasures and sentiments relative to such gifts, as humility and a profound respect for Holy Mother Church, for those who govern her and for her teachers." [1]

St. Teresa uses the following words when speaking of that special and more elevated knowledge which the soul receives in perfect Contemplation: "As far as I can judge, the soul is entirely out of itself and God then discloses wonderful things to it. When it has returned to itself, it draws so much advantage from the marvellous things which it has seen, that all that is earthly seems to it but mud. It thus conceives such a disdain for what it formerly held in esteem that it supports life only with pain. God seems to have wished to teach it something of the beauty and richness of that happy country where it will one day dwell; just as by means of the spies sent by the Israelites, He made known to His people the fertility of the Promised Land. He acts in the same way towards this soul in order that it may joyously bear the weariness of so painful a journey, having obtained a view of that happy goal where eternal rest awaits it." [2]

[1] *Lettres*, Lettre 58, p. 269.

[2] *Château intérieur*, 6e demeure, ch. 5, t. 3, p. 465.

But nothing equals the perfection which these special ideas attain in mystic Consummated Union. There they seem bathed in indescribable light, cloudless peace and never-ending rest. Here is what St. Ignatius has left in his private notes found after his death: "I did not, as on the previous days, see the Three Persons (of the adorable Trinity) distinct, but in a brilliant light, One Essence which attracted me wholly and entirely to Its Love. In the same way I felt as if I were under the shelter and guidance of Jesus, which did not in any way diminish my total union with the Divine Majesty; on the contrary, this union rather increased." [1]

In short, in extraordinary prayer the knowledge of a mystery, say the Nativity, is never separated from a general loving view of God, but these two distinct objects appear, as it were, bathed in the same light of wisdom.

When the sun rises above the horizon, its pleasant, timid rays light up at one and the same moment both the infinite space of the heavens and the object under our eyes. Nevertheless, the sight of the heavens arouses a much deeper admiration than that of the

[1] Bollandists, *Vie de St. Ignace*, t. 34, p. 540, n. 628.

object. It is the same in Contemplation: Wisdom, like to a sun shining with knowledge, is enkindled with love, illuminating both the infinite perfections of Our Lord's Divinity and Nativity: but the general view of God arouses an incomparably greater admiration than the special view of this mystery. "These two kinds of knowledge," says St. John of the Cross, " are a source of power to the soul; yet nothing is to be compared to the joy which the knowledge of God procures. Words fail to express the rapturous delight one drinks in in Him." [1]

This method, namely by means of Contemplation, of learning about the mysteries of the Life and Death of Our Lord Jesus Christ, is very perfect and sanctifying. The soul favored with this grace should receive it humbly and gratefully and esteem it most highly.

[1] *Montée du Carmel*, 1 : 2, ch. 26, t. 2, p. 317.

# PART II

## The Various Trials through which Souls Called to Contemplation Must Pass

## CHAPTER I

### PENETRATING SIGHT OF ONE'S SINS. FEELING OF HAVING BEEN ABANDONED BY GOD

CONTEMPLATION is a great exaltation for the soul, since it is the beginning of eternal beatitude and makes it converse with God after the manner of the Angels. Hence he who has been called to this remarkable favor must be extremely humble, for it is written: "Every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled: and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." [1]

The soul's efforts, accompanied by ordinary grace, will not be enough to gain such humility —God's all-powerful hand must come in. To this end He sheds a penetrating, supernatural light upon the soul which shows it its least defects and so covers it with confusion.

Nor is that all, for this same light further unveils to it God's infinite greatness, and the soul thus experiences in the beginning an inexplicable uneasiness, like that of a pretentious ignoramus in the presence of a great scholar.

[1] Luke 18 : 14.

Sometimes this constraint increases to such an extent that the soul becomes crushed beneath the weight of the Divine Majesty. Later on, just as the ignorant man made timid by the learned professor finishes by losing the easy use of his faculties, so the soul overwhelmed by God's Greatness, loses the easy use of its memory, understanding and will.

Let us hear what St. John of the Cross says: " God alone is the author of this painful situation, in which the soul can do nothing. Incapable of giving itself to prayer or lending continuous attention to things spiritual, it is equally powerless in attending to temporal matters. While plunged in profound abstraction, its memory is often at fault and whole minutes elapse before it knows whether it has done or thought such and such a thing. In spite of all its efforts, it cannot fix its mind on the present action, nor on that which is to follow." [1]

This supernatural light shows the soul not only God's infinite Greatness, but also His spotless Purity, and the soul feels kept at a distance; just as the man in the street feels instinctively cut off from the King's palace.

[1] *Nuit obscure*, 1 : 2, ch. 8, *Œuvres*, t. 3, p. 368.

In a word the soul sees God's infinite Justice in a supernatural way by means of this light and is as terrified as a great criminal before his judge.

In short, the soul by comparing God's infinite Greatness with its own smallness, His infinite Purity with its defilement, His infinite Holiness with its iniquities, loses all feeling of hope and believes that it can never reach familiarity with God. This is the pain of despair. All souls called to Contemplation pass, to a greater or less degree, through this trial of rejection by God and of despair, but with souls called to perfect Contemplation it attains an intensity which goes as far as a feeling of reprobation and recalls to mind the pains of Hell. Listen again to what St. John of the Cross says: " This kind of torture and suffering is beyond all description. . . . The afflicted soul sees itself the object of God's aversion and its torment is increased by the firm conviction that the Lord has taken a disgust for it, entirely abandoned it and, in consequence, cast it into darkness. This thought is the cause of the most acute and indescribable suffering to it. . . . In the midst of the oppression of this Contemplation, which puri-

fies it, the soul sees itself under the shadow of death. It seems to share the agony and tortures of Hell, that is, it feels deprived of God, punished and repelled by Him, and it bears the whole weight of His wrath. To this present state is joined a fearful dread, the thought that it will always last." [1]

But God, to Whom such a soul is especially dear, does not wish that it should die, but live. He plunges it into this abyss of humiliation so as to humble it, but at the same time He lifts it up in a wonderful way, by enkindling in its heart a burning fire of charity, whose flames leap up unceasingly. These flames are recognized by the fact that the soul which is submitted to this terrible trial remains quite detached from creatures, always keeps its thoughts fixed on God, preserves an unbroken desire to please Him and an abiding determination to conquer itself in all things from love of Him. This constant desire, it is true, is a restless one, since the soul, overwhelmed by the penetrating sight of its faults, thinks that in all that it does it displeases God, Whom it would wish so much to love, but this persistent anxiety detracts in no way

[1] *Nuit obscure*, 1 : 2, ch. 6, t. 3, pp. 350, 351.

either from the purity or force of its love. This burning love, resulting not from lengthy reflections, but from what the Holy Ghost has divinely shed upon the soul, is a powerful force in raising it from dejection.

An unerring direction is, however, necessary at such a time and the choice of it depends both upon the persons and the circumstances.

St. Francis of Sales prayed thus in his great temptation to despair: " My God, if I am not to love Thee in Heaven, I wish at least to love Thee upon earth." Others have imitated him.

The same Saint so directed St. Jane Frances of Chantal during her great interior suffering that confidence was aroused in her by means of love. Here is the summary of his great principle: " The more we love God the more He loves us in return and consequently the greater may be the peace in which we dwell." [1]

Venerable Father de la Colombière directed souls subjected to this test in another manner: he wished to see them throw themselves into the ocean of God's mercy, Who would be

[1] *Vie de sainte Jeanne de Chantal*, par la mère de Changy, deuxième partie, ch. 32. *Œuvres*, Plon, t. 1, p. 327.

more glorified in proportion as they were more filled with miseries.[1]

The same thought consoled him personally in his interior suffering.[2]

If the attraction of grace does not suggest any special mode of direction, the ordinary method must be followed, which St. Alphonsus Liguori thus formulates: "Entire resignation to the Divine Will by offering oneself without reserve to endure all these sufferings and even greater ones for as long as it shall please God."[3]

The pain of which we speak does not make itself felt in prayer only, but also in the midst of one's active life. However, as the daily occupations always offer some distraction, it is in prayer that the suffering is especially keen. It then happens that the pain caused by God's abandonment becomes so acute that it partially consumes the powers of the soul, which can only do two things, moan and resign itself, following Our Lord's example, Who said in the Garden: "Father, Thy will,

[1] Cf. *Lettres du Ven. P. de la Colombière*, ll. 43, 44.

[2] *Retraite spirituelle du V. P. de la Colombière*, Première Semaine.

[3] *Homo apostolicus*, App. 1, De oratione contemplationis, n. 10, in fine.

not Mine be done," and on the Cross: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

It still remains to say a few words as to the time when this terrible trial makes its appearance and as to its duration. God does not usually send a soul such interior suffering unless He has prepared it for it by heavenly delights; otherwise it would not have the necessary courage to come out victorious. As to the duration, it is always long, that is, it lasts several years.

During this long period, the trial presents itself in three different ways: There are sometimes intermittent periods of consolation; sometimes rays of joy break the cloud of suffering at rare intervals; and lastly the desolation is sometimes permanent and not one drop of dew falls from Heaven.

One sometimes meets souls who, having received once for all some supernatural consolation, afterwards remain in the state of anguish just mentioned for the rest of their lives. These souls may be recognized by their overflowing humility, which springs naturally from an abyss of confusion, and by their love of God, the flames of which shoot up unceasingly from the fire enkindled and

fed by the Holy Ghost. The vocation of these blessed souls is to preserve in the Church the image of Our Lord's agony, but they are very few in number. In the immense majority of cases, the trial ceases after a few years.

This terrible interior pain has received different names: St. John of the Cross calls it "The Dark Night;" St. Francis of Sales, "Death of the Will;" St. Alphonsus, "Supernatural Aridity;" whilst the greater number of writers use the general term "Purification of the soul raised to the mystic state."

St. Alphonsus sums up the question in the following masterful words: "It is a certain Divine light by which God makes the soul recognize its nothingness.

"Here the soul finds itself in a sort of terrible agony, for although it be more determined then to overcome itself and more anxious to please God, yet the more it recognizes its imperfections, the more it seems rejected by God and abandoned for having abused the benefits received. Much more, even the spiritual exercises which it performs, such as prayer, mortifications, Communions, increase its sadness. Indeed as it only accomplishes these

things with pain and great disgust, it thinks they all deserve punishment and that on their account it becomes more hateful to God. Besides, it often seems to these souls that they hate God above all things and that this is the cause why God punishes them as His enemies and makes them already feel in this life the pains of the damned and of being abandoned by God. And sometimes God allows this desolation to be accompanied by a thousand other temptations and impulses to impurity, anger, blasphemy, disbelief, and above all, to despair. Then these poor souls, who are plunged in great darkness and confusion, cannot distinguish the resistance of the will, which really exists, but remains hidden from them or at least doubtful, on account of the actual darkness. They therefore fear lest they have consented and consider themselves all the more abandoned by God.[1] . . . "

Let the Director exhort this desolate soul not to lose courage, but to wait for great things from God Who is leading it by the safest road, the way of the Cross.

Let him teach it also first to humiliate itself as deserving of this treatment from God, on

[1] *Homme apostolique*, App. 1, n. 9.

account of the faults of its past life; then, to keep perfectly resigned to the Divine Will, showing itself quite ready to suffer all this and even more, as long as it shall please God; and lastly, to cast itself, as though dead, into the arms of God's mercy, and leave itself entirely to the protection of the Most Holy Virgin Mary, who is rightly called: "Mother of mercy and consoler of the afflicted." [1]

[1] *Homme apostolique*, App. 1, n. 10.

## CHAPTER II

### SECOND TRIAL: SPIRITUAL ARIDITY

GOD'S custom is to grant the great grace of Contemplation in a stable manner only after He has tested the soul as He tested Abraham. He wishes to see, as St. Ignatius says, whether it is able to make progress in His service and work for His glory, when deprived of these abundant consolations and special favors which are not its by right. Further, in order that privileged souls may preserve their humility, they need to learn by experience that the birth and preservation of the grace of Contemplation in no way depends upon them, but that it is a free gift from the Divine Goodness.[1]

Such are the two reasons which explain this undeniable fact. Very often, especially in the beginning, the grace of Contemplation is withdrawn from souls which have just received it.

What are they to do when the grace of Contemplation disappears? Two cases present themselves:

[1] *Spiritual Exercises*, Discernment of Spirits, Week 1, Rule 9.

1. The supernatural state disappears entirely and the soul returns to its ordinary state, but without any special aridity. Then, since the soul is reduced to the usual state, it is clear that it ought to pray in the same way as souls who have received no grace of Contemplation, namely, give its time to distinct acts of the intellect and will. Yet here a reservation must be made. It would be extremely severe to oblige such souls to retain nothing of the past Contemplation, not even the memory. These souls privileged by God, who have tasted the joys of Contemplation, remember the peace they enjoyed and are led to seek God in rest. Their memory records the sweets of Divine love and they long to revive them by devoting more time to affections than to reflections. This two-fold attraction, coming from the Holy Ghost, must be respected.

2. Not only does the supernatural state entirely disappear, but the soul languishes in complete dryness. The virtues, faith, hope, charity and the rest, are paralyzed, as it were. One of St. Ignatius's metaphors helps us to understand this state: a perfectly healthy eye sees with difficulty where the light is poor; in

the same way these virtues, even when possessed in a high degree, can make their acts only with great difficulty, since the motive grace is very weak. What is to be done then? Let the soul begin by making an act of faith and place itself in the presence of God, then make some reflections as well as possible, especially some prayers and affections. God does not ask for the impossible, but is satisfied with acts of humility, confidence, resignation, conformity to His Will, infinitely just, holy and worthy of being loved, even although these different acts seem to come only from the lips.

This is the method followed by St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi in the long dryness which followed her numerous ecstasies: "She was seen," says Fr. Cépari, "at the foot of the Blessed Sacrament, sometimes rosary in hand, sometimes reading vocal prayers, sometimes following the history of the Passion or the life of some Saint, and she was obliged to have recourse to this method, even for her thanksgiving after Holy Communion. One day she said to one of her sisters: 'The soul which has tasted how sweet the Lord is, must in very truth love the Cross and have become mis-

tress of itself, if it is to continue to serve God in time of dryness as it did in time of Consolation.' " [1]

[1] *Vie de sainte Marie Madeleine de Pazzi*, par le P. Cépari, S. J., ch. 26, Périsse, t. 2, p. 172.

## CHAPTER III

### THIRD TRIAL: TEMPTATIONS OF THE DEVIL

A KING does not alight at the house of one of his subjects unless it is richly furnished; God does not visit a soul to unite Himself with it in a very special manner unless it be adorned with exceptional virtues. Now the great virtues are the portion of those who have heroically triumphed over the opposite temptations. This is the reason why God allows the devil to specially tempt the souls who have received the gift of Contemplation and generously correspond with it.

The virtues attacked are first, the theological virtues: Faith, by doubts as regards revealed truths; hope, by despair; charity by revolt against God and the spirit of blasphemy. Then come the temptations against moral virtues, that is temptations to anger, pride, gluttony, lust, independence, jealousy and the rest.

All these temptations are usually found in souls which are making serious progress in Contemplation; so there must be no surprise

when they come; nay, rather, one may prophesy without fear of mistake, that they will come sooner or later.

They then attack the soul with such intense violence that it often fears lest it has given consent to them and lost grace. This painful doubt becomes the greatest suffering in this terrible struggle. The best remedy is to lay all bare, in perfect Christian simplicity, to a learned, prudent, and experienced Confessor. The light given by the Confessor, and more still, the humility of the soul which lays itself perfectly bare will, one day or another, obtain for it the grace of victory.

These temptations are not storms of a few hours nor even of a few days; they generally last years. St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi underwent all their fearful attacks for a period of five years.[1] Generosity, then, is not enough to gain the victory. In addition there must be exceptional patience and perseverance. Let the soul constantly renew its wavering courage in the pious hope that God will do great things in it after the victory. Then, the more it has struggled, the more its

[1] *Vie de sainte Marie Madeleine de Pazzi*, par le P. Cépari, S. J., ch. 6, Périsse, t. 1, p. 112.

virtue will shine with unspeakable brightness; then will the joys of peace succeed the trials of the past struggle and its God will come again to unite Himself to it in an indescribable and loving intimacy.

Either as the result of the violence of the temptations or of their duration, many defects, which until then had remained hidden, will become exteriorly apparent, it is true, to men's eyes and lessen the reputation for virtue which the contemplative soul enjoyed. Let it profit of such a favorable opportunity of offering God the entire sacrifice of its reputation; let it humiliate itself at the sight of so many defects of which it was ignorant and look upon itself as the most unworthy of all; and lastly, let it gratefully receive the warnings given it and make serious efforts to correct its defects. If it really enters upon this road of abnegation it will make more progress in a month, in spite of the small faults committed, than it would have done in a year of unbroken peace. The soldier who becomes covered with dust in the midst of the fray wins more in heroism and bravery than he who rests spick and span guarding the baggage.

Here is what we read in the life of St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi: "It would be difficult to explain the disgust and repugnance with which the devil inspired her for any command that was given her. He sometimes used such force that she could not prevent herself from answering her Mother Prioress: No, Mother, I cannot do what you bid. But she had hardly uttered these words than she used to burst into tears and loud protestations that she would rather lose her life than disobey her Superiors. Then throwing herself at the Mother's knees, she would renew her vows. This Mother, in spite of the compassion she felt for the Saint, was God's instrument, and wished to effect the Saint's advancement in virtue by these trials. Thus the Mother used to humiliate her deeply before all the Sisters and impose severe penances upon her; but the Saint used to submit to anything with a look of happiness which greatly edified the community. At last, when the five years of trial had elapsed, all these temptations ceased." [1]

This would be the place to point out

[1] *Vie de sainte Marie Madeleine de Pazzi*, par le P. Cépari, S. J., ch. 6, Périsse, t. 1, pp. 128, 129.

the special means which help in the struggle against the different temptations, but the point is treated in a great number of ascetic works which may be consulted, so I shall say nothing more on the subject.

## CHAPTER IV

### FOURTH TRIAL: DOUBT AS TO THE TRUTH OF THE SUPERNATURAL GRACES RECEIVED

As long as the Contemplation lasts, the soul does not doubt of its happiness; it feels sure that it is God working within it; but when this delightful moment is past, uneasiness takes possession of it and it wonders whether it has not been the victim of an illusion. That trial is universal, and when a soul does not experience it, the greatest reserve must be shown in attributing what takes place within it to a good spirit.

Yet from where can this suffering, so bitter for the contemplative soul, arise? First, its doubts are the natural consequence of the clear view which it has of its faults. Sunk, as it is, in an abyss of confusion, it cannot believe that God is so kindly and lovingly disposed towards it. Secondly, the devil tries with all his might to increase its perplexities. Experience has taught him that as long as a soul is perturbed and tossed by these doubts, the graces which it receives

only produce a part of their sanctifying effects. Lastly, God, for His part, allows them in order to keep the soul humble and wisely reserved in its judgments. If it had no doubts, it would become, in its positive consciousness of graces received, too positive in its ideas and too decisive in speech.

When St. John of the Cross was asked his opinion as to the spirit guiding a certain nun in prayer, he answered that he could not regard her spirit as the true spirit of God "because she is imprudently secure and not sufficiently fearful of being led into interior error, whilst the spirit of God never proceeds without this salutary fear so as to preserve the soul from evil, as the Wise Man said." [1]

In order to conquer this trial, it is of the utmost necessity to choose a learned, prudent and experienced Director and obey him blindly. Then this triumphant answer can be made to the tempter: Like a child I am obeying him whom God has given me as a guide; he has told me not to doubt, so I have no doubts. This simple way of submitting one's judgment seems quite in conformity with God's designs for the soul: He wishes,

[1] *Lettres spirituelles*, t. 1, p. 355.

indeed, to make it humble, modest and docile.

But if a soul tormented by this uneasiness, which at times becomes terrible, has at hand no Director capable of successfully guiding it, what is to be done? If it is a soul consecrated to God in the religious life, the Superiors must procure it an interview with a Confessor who is experienced in these matters. Thus it was that St. Teresa was first reassured by St. Francis Borgia and afterwards by St. Peter of Alcantara. If the person in question is perfectly free, he must himself seek out a prudent guide. Until such a one has been found, he must wait, trusting in Divine Providence, which cannot fail him.

## CHAPTER V

### FIFTH TRIAL: A MYSTERIOUS SUFFERING IN WHICH JOY AND PAIN ARE BOTH UNITED AND WHERE THE SOUL IS PURIFIED AS IN A PURGATORY

THE holy souls in Purgatory reach Heaven only after having been entirely purified in this place of suffering; the chosen soul arrives at Contemplation—the beginning of celestial happiness—only after being purified in an earthly purgatory.

A somewhat similar pain is experienced in both these purgatories.

In the Purgatory of the other world, God discloses to the souls detained there His infinite Beauty, which attracts them with a power that no intellect can understand; but alas! the defilement of these souls is an obstacle to the much longed for union with God. It is the suffering of the paralytic, parched to death and yet not able to take one step towards the source of living water under his eyes.

In the earthly purgatory, God discloses

His indescribable Beauty in the midst of a very exalted Contemplation. At the sight of this Beauty, all created things lose their attraction for the soul, whose one desire is to be united to God, its sovereign Good. But its sins rise up between it and God like a wall which it cannot scale. A mysterious mixed feeling of joy and suffering is the result, for if, on the one hand, the sight of the sovereign Good thrills the soul with joy; on the other, its separation from It causes it immense suffering.

St. Teresa describes this mysterious martyrdom in these words: "The soul suddenly feels within it an indescribable longing for God. Filled through and through with this desire, it immediately passes through such a delirium of suffering that it is raised quite out of itself and above all created things. God places it in such a vast desert that it could not, even by making the greatest efforts, find a single being upon earth to be its companion. Besides, even if it could, it would not, for its only aspiration is to die in this solitude. It would be useless to speak of it, or for it to force itself to answer; nothing can raise its spirit from this solitude. Although God then

seems to me far removed from the soul, yet He often discloses His sovereign Greatness in such an extraordinary way that it surpasses all conception. Besides, words fail to express it and one must, in my opinion, have experienced it to be able to conceive and believe it. The end of such elevated communication is not to console the soul, but to show it how justly it is distressed at seeing itself separated from the Good which includes within Itself all other good. Having perceived this, the soul feels both the thirst for God and the severity of its solitude, increased. It is a prey to such refined and piercing suffering, it feels itself in such a pitiless desert, that it can say literally with David: 'I have watched and am become as a sparrow all alone on the housetop.' [1]

"In this condition the soul does not seem to be any longer in itself, but, like the sparrow on the housetop, it dwells alone in the highest part of itself, looking down upon all creatures from this height; I will go further and say that it is above the highest part of itself that it has its dwelling. . . . From time to time I remembered what St. Paul said, that he was

[1] Ps. 101: 8.

crucified to the world. . . . Something of this nature then takes place within the soul: no consolation comes to it either from Heaven, which is not yet its dwelling place, or from earth, for which it has no affection and from which it does not wish to receive any. It is truly crucified, as it were, between Heaven and earth, a prey to suffering without receiving any comfort either from one or the other. From Heaven, it is true, there comes that wonderful knowledge of God of which I have spoken and which far surpasses all our desires, but such a sight of God increases rather than lessens its torment, because it still more inflames its desire of possessing Him. At times the intensity of the suffering is such that it causes the soul to lose all consciousness. True, this last effect is of short duration, being, as it were, the last death agony. But there is such happiness in this agony of suffering that I do not know with what to compare it. It is an unspeakable martyrdom of combined suffering and delight. Very far from wishing to find the slightest relief from the pleasant things the earth formerly offered it, the soul cannot endure the sight of them and casts them far from it with supreme disgust. It

knows well that it only wants its God, but it loves nothing particular in Him; rather it loves in Him all that is He, and it does not know at all what it loves. . . . The powers are here suspended as the result of pain, as they are by pleasure in Union and Ecstasy. . . .

" As almost every new favor that I receive causes me fear, until Our Lord reassures me, that of which I am speaking also caused me a certain alarm in the beginning. But the Divine Master told me not to be frightened, but to esteem this grace more highly than all the others which He had granted me. The soul was cleansed by this suffering, worked and purified as gold in the crucible, so that God's hand might the better spread upon it the enamel of His gifts; in a word, the soul here endured the suffering which would have been its lot in Purgatory." [1]

The earthly purgatory takes another form, too, God casting a glance of love upon the soul which attracts it with a force that no tongue can describe; but the soul is too weak to fly to the bosom of its God. Here again is a mysterious blending of joy and suffering; for if on one side God's glance is full of unspeak-

[1] *Vie par elle-même*, ch. 20, pp. 218, 219, 220, 223.

able sweetness, on the other the soul's weakness prevents it from corresponding. This causes terrible suffering. I will hazard a comparison. Look at a child in its cradle, whom the devoted mother attracts towards her by her tender glance. All the movements of this little angel express its joy, but after many vain attempts, finding that its swaddling clothes prevent it from throwing itself into its mother's arms, it starts crying. The mother's smile causes the infant joy, but the weakness which prevents it from responding, suffering.

Let us hear what St. Catherine of Genoa says. She first describes the suffering of a holy soul in Purgatory: "God casts on it the rays of His love, which inflame it, attracting it towards Him with a force sufficient to annihilate it, all immortal though it be. . . . When the soul by an interior glance sees itself thus attracted by God with such a burning love, then in the warmth of this love enkindled by its all gracious Lord and God, it melts entirely away. . . . It feels itself wholly consumed by the desire of returning God love for love and of throwing itself into His embrace. But, checked by the impediment of its sins, it can-

not follow this attraction which God exercises upon it, in other words it cannot reply to that unitive glance which God casts upon it in order to draw it to Him. . . . It feels given over to a suffering which no words can express and it is this suffering, springing in its case from everything it sees, which forms, properly speaking, the pain of Purgatory." [1]

The Saint then comes to the description of her own earthly purgatory: "What I have said about this takes place spiritually within me. . . . The prison where I seem to be is the world; my bonds are the fetters of my body. Enlightened by grace, my soul understands what it is to be kept a prisoner from God and to find in itself the obstacle which prevents its supreme happiness, and withholds it from gaining its end. As the soul is delicate and sensitive in the extreme, this delay is the cause of indescribable pain to it." [2]

It remains for us to examine what the soul must do in order to correspond with the incomparable grace of this supernatural trial which always lasts some time. It is being purified in the earthly purgatory; it ought, then, to

[1] *Traité du Purgatoire*, Bouix, 1883, p. 233.
[2] *Ibid.*, Ch. 17, p. 241.

take the souls retained in the Purgatory of the next life, as models. These holy souls recognize that they are justly punished. Let the soul tested on earth also recognize the justice of its trial and follow their example by saying: "Thou art just, O Lord: and Thy judgment is right," [1] or again: "And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds." [2]

The holy souls in Purgatory live in a state of perfect forgetfulness of creatures, having but one desire, to reach perfect union with God in Heaven. Following their example, the soul which is made to undergo the test of purification in this world, ought not to turn to created things in order to find alleviation for its suffering, but direct all its desires towards God, saying with the Prophet: "One thing I have asked of the Lord: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life." [3] And since there are two kinds of union, that of interest, which is born of hope, and that of disinterestedness, arising from pure charity, let the soul, of course, aspire to to that which will place it in possession of the sovereign Good, but much more, to that which

[1] Ps. 118: 137. [2] Luke 23: 41.
[3] Ps. 26: 4.

will make it live no longer for itself but for God.

Lastly and beyond all else, the holy souls in Purgatory live in perfect conformity with the Divine Will, which cleanses them in their terrible sufferings. Such a high opinion have they of the infinite perfection of this Divine Will that the slightest impulse in opposition to it has become absolutely impossible to them. Let the soul who is tried on earth follow their example and submit in all things to God's Will, whether it be as to the intensity or the duration of the suffering. This Divine Will, indeed, always remains infinitely just, holy and worthy of being loved, even though it tests in such a fearful way.

## CHAPTER VI

### A FEW WORDS ON THE "SOUL'S DARK NIGHT," BY ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS

ALL souls must pass through an earthly purgatory before arriving at the great grace of perfect Contemplation, but all are not purified in the same way. St. Catherine of Genoa's purification was not like that of St. Teresa's in all respects, and the purgatory of these two saints differs from that through which St. John of the Cross passed. He depicts his in a well-known work entitled: "The Soul's Dark Night." It may be useful to say something about it on account of the great light found there for the direction of souls.

When a ray of sunshine strikes the diseased eye, it burns and blinds it. Yet the light and warmth of this ray are good and soothing in themselves, but the eye has not enough strength to receive them as such. Once the eye is healed, this same ray which dazzled and burnt it, gives a gentle light and warmth.

So it is with the ray of Divine Wisdom, which God never sends without adding to

it the fire of His love, as we have seen.[1] When the Great Doctor wishes to cure an ailing soul by means of interior suffering endured with resignation, He sheds His Wisdom and His love upon it in too intense a degree for the soul to be able to receive them without suffering. Blinded by a too vivid light, burnt by a too scorching flame, the soul experiences great pain. Then after long years have passed, when the soul is cured of its infirmities, that same wisdom which blinded it, gently illuminates it, and that love which burned it up makes it taste unspeakable sweetness. Thus it is neither the wisdom nor the love which change, but it is the soul which is wonderfully changed by them. It passes from darkness to light, from the torment of the flames to the joys of sweet love.

In order to explain this mysterious purification due to the wisdom and love which the Holy Ghost sheds upon the soul, take another comparison more spiritual and therefore truer. An intelligent but backward pupil attends the lessons of a talented master. The intellectual light which flashes from the master's mind at first tires his pupil, who, not understanding,

[1] Part 1, ch. 5.

finds the time long and is humiliated by having his ignorance shown him. The result of this is discouragement and sometimes despair of ever succeeding in understanding such a master. But if the pupil perseveres, in the end all is changed. The pupil's mind, when trained, readily grasps the bent of his master's talent, and the same intellectual light which at first bored and discouraged him is now the cause of joy and hope.

Such is the case of a soul adorned with conspicuous gifts of grace but yet sunk in the darkness of its faults and imperfections: God sends it too bright a ray of His wisdom and too strong a flame of His love for its weakness. Uneasiness, fatigue, confusion, discouragement and suffering attack and overwhelm it, and at such a time the powerlessness of ever finding rest in the knowledge and love of God is often the cause of profound despair. But if the soul humbly and generously perseveres for years, if it bears this terrible interior suffering with resignation, it is cleansed and healed and strengthened; and then, this same Divine wisdom which used to blind it, this love which used to burn it up, is the cause of unspeakable delight.

The soul is divided into two parts, as it were: one higher and spiritual; the other lower and sensible. Both have committed faults and imperfections, both need to be healed and strengthened. According to St. John of the Cross, the Divine wisdom and love first occupy themselves with the purification, cure and fortification of the sensible part. This first cleansing effected, there still remains another and much more difficult one to bring about, that of healing the spiritual part of the soul in such a way that it may no longer have any self-love or self-complacency. In order to attain this finished perfection, God increases to a frightful extent the light of His wisdom which blinds, and the fire of His love which burns. All the imperfection that remains even in the very depths of the soul is then consumed. This holocaust, however, is only effected at the cost of a suffering which surpasses all conception and puts one in mind of Hell.

If the soul endures this terrible trial with humility, patience and perseverance, at the end of the number of years settled by the Divine Decree, it assuredly finds itself transformed in God and overwhelmed with all

good. The purification of the senses is the gateway leading to imperfect Contemplation; the purification of the spirit, that leading to perfect Contemplation.

Listen to what St. John of the Cross says in describing the wonderful passing of a soul from darkness of spirit to the unspeakable delights of perfect Contemplation: "The struggle in this warfare is terrible, for the peace which is to follow and which is so ardently longed for, is immense; and even if the suffering is deep, piercing, extreme, the love to which it leads is very deep and pure. The more sublime and finished the work, the longer and more painful must have been the labor; the great size of a building calls for proportionately solid foundations. . . . The soul, while passing through the night of purification, approaches the state of perfection where unspeakable good awaits it and where its powers will see themselves enriched with innumerable gifts and virtues." [1]

It remains to mention why St. John of the Cross calls the ray of wisdom which purifies the lower part of the soul the "dark night of sense," and the more powerful ray which

[1] *Nuit obscure*, 1: 2, ch. 9; t. 3, pp. 381, 382.

purifies its higher part, " the dark night of the spirit." As we have just seen, it is the property of these two luminous rays of Divine wisdom to blind the soul and cast it into darkness. It is natural, then, to give their action, that of producing darkness, the name of " dark night."

# PART III

## The Virtues and Devotions at which a Soul must Labor if it Wishes to Make Serious Progress in Contemplation

# CHAPTER I

## IN GENERAL, THE SOUL WHICH IS CALLED TO CONTEMPLATION MUST GIVE ITSELF TO THE STUDY AND PRACTICE OF SOLID VIRTUES

CONTEMPLATION is a look of mutual love between God and the soul. Since it is by the brightness and fragrance of its virtues that a soul is pleasing to God, the soul called to Contemplation must give itself to the practice of solid virtues, of which the most pleasing to its Heavenly Spouse are humility, obedience, brotherly love and care to accomplish God's good pleasure in all things.

Let us begin with humility. The characteristic of this virtue is that it attracts God's love, as we see from the numerous examples in Holy Writ, in particular from that of Our Lady, who sings these words in the Magnificat: "He hath regarded the humility of His handmaid." [1]

Contemplation, it is true, never exists unless accompanied by a holy wonder, from which

[1] Luke 1: 48.

springs humility: how can the Creator stoop down so lovingly to a creature filled with so much misery and sin! But let no one be deceived, for this humility, shed upon the contemplative soul by the Holy Ghost, is only a gentle and beneficial rain from the clouds. Now, if the rain is not to evaporate and be useless, it is not enough that it should be abundant, but the gardener must also labor to make it penetrate the ground.

The contemplative soul, then, must labor apart from prayer, where it is passive, to acquire *humility*. Humility towards God, humility towards men—these two divisions of humility cannot be separated.

So, then, you souls called to the great grace of Contemplation, if you wish to profit of it fully, love to be forgotten and accounted as nothing. Speak little of yourselves and hide the exceptional gifts of God. Be content to let ordinary virtues shine exteriorly, as Our Divine Master expressed it, "So let your light shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father Who is in Heaven." [1] As for exceptional graces, keep them quite hidden. Imitate Our Lady, who

[1] Matth. 5: 16.

presented herself in the Temple to be purified and so hid from men's eyes the treasure of her miraculous virginity. This concealed virtue draws down God's love in a wonderful way.

In the second place, do not obstinately defend your opinions nor excuse yourself in trifles, even when the accusation is not perfectly accurate. This is the surest way of having that loving look directed upon you which the Father cast upon His Son when He was silent before Herod and Pilate and made no answer to the outrageous insults and calumny.

Lastly, if you wish to be the object of God's love by reason of your humility, force yourself to regard yourself always and in everything, as the last of all.

The Pharisee who thought himself better than the rest of mankind and said to himself: "I am not as the rest of men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, as also is this publican," [1] only made himself the object of God's hatred and disgust; while the publican, who stood afar off and thought himself unworthy of a place amidst the Jews assembled in the

[1] Luke 18: 11.

Temple, drew down a look of pitying kindness which justified him.[1]

Unquestionably, Contemplation always diffuses an all Divine attraction in the soul which impels it to take the last place, but this attraction must be coöperated with by considering in all simplicity the good qualities of one's brethren and closing one's eyes to their defects. This practice was dear to all the saints who were raised to the highest Contemplation.

He who wishes to enjoy favors from God must join *obedience* to humility.

O you contemplative souls, if you would win more and more the look of love from God, be prompt, joyful and simple in your obedience in all things. See your Divine Master, Our Lord Jesus Christ: out of obedience He causes Himself to be baptized in the Jordan and a voice is heard from Heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased."[2] He holds converse on Mount Thabor with Moses and Elias of all that He must suffer in Jerusalem, being obedient even unto the death of the Cross, and this same heavenly voice is heard again, repeating God's satisfaction.

[1] Luke 18: 14. [2] Matth. 3: 17.

Obey not only your Superior's voice, but also that of the rule, the certain expression of God's will. Avoid exceptions and singularities, the strange illusion into which the devil has made so many contemplative souls fall. Think of Jesus submitting to the full observance of the law in His Circumcision, from which His Divine Conception exempted Him. See Mary complying with the law of purification. Being a Virgin, she was exempt. Then lifting your eyes to Heaven, contemplate the incomparable look of satisfaction which God casts upon the Divine Child and His Mother, and you will understand that the way which is especially pleasing to God's Majesty is not the way of exception, even that to which one has a claim, but of the common life. It is not, however, my intention to condemn necessary exceptions, since they form a part of community life, but to prevent an illusion which consists in thinking that necessary, which really is not so.

Again, God's love is won by *brotherly love.* We can only please God by our likeness to Jesus Christ, Our Lord, our elder Brother. Now this likeness is born of charity, for the Divine Master has said: " By this shall all

men know that you are My disciples, if you have love one for another." [1]

So, then, you souls called to Contemplation, make every effort to assist your brethren, whether it be by leaving them the best or by taking upon yourself work and allowing them to rest, or whether it be by lavishing your care upon them in all their needs. Then will God recognize in you the image of His Son Jesus, Who provided bread for the hungry in the desert, and washed the feet of His beloved Disciples at the Last Supper, and this likeness to Jesus will draw down that look of love which brings about rapid advancement in supernatural paths. Do not stop until you have succeeded in not harboring the slightest shadow of resentment against those who injure you. On the contrary, love them with a special love and, touched by all their troubles, show yourself ready to suffer everything in order to comfort them in their suffering. Then will God see in you the likeness to His Son Jesus, Who allowed Himself to be kissed by Judas and prayed for His executioners; then will He be pleased with you and make you

[1] John 13: 35.

taste of heavenly delights ever more and more.

In a word, in order to reach the highest point of Contemplation, it is absolutely essential to aim at " doing in all things that which is most pleasing to God."

Contemplation is essentially a union of love in which the soul gives itself to God, and God to the soul. The more perfect this reciprocal gift, the more elevated the Contemplation. Now, to give oneself to God is to do His Holy Will. The soul finds itself, in the act of Contemplation, wonderfully assisted by the pure love which the Holy Ghost sheds upon it, but this pure love is not enough. The seed scattered upon the earth does not germinate unless the husbandman's hand makes it penetrate the soil. Having felt the need in a passive manner during prayer of pleasing God, the soul must absolutely become active and force itself to fulfil all the heavenly demands in the details of its daily occupations.

Let there be no mistake here. The great secret for making rapid progress in Contemplation is to wound God's heart, who then puts no limits to the wealth of His love and gifts. Now, the arrow which wounds it is the

burning desire to please Him in all things. When a soul which is called to Contemplation reaches that happy state where, being truly stripped of self and purified from all exterior affection, its life is to the full God's possession and at the entire mercy of His Divine Will, the greatest favors succeed one another in an extraordinary way.

Such is the way which leads the chosen souls to the summit of Contemplation. It could not be otherwise, since it is this way which Our Lord pointed out when He said: "And He that sent Me is with Me and He hath not left Me alone: for I do always the things that please Him." [1]

Such is the way which, following the Divine Master's example, men like St. Bernard, St. Dominic, St. Francis, St. Ignatius, St. Francis Xavier have followed and which has guided them to the great ecstasies of Contemplation, where the soul is not only lost in God, but also inflamed with such burning love, that of its very fulness there leaps up flames of zeal which convert the world.

"Above all," writes St. Teresa, "who could say what numbers of souls the devil has

[1] John 8: 29.

been robbed of by a St. Dominic, a St. Francis, and other founders of religious Orders, and is now being robbed of by Father Ignatius, founder of the Society of Jesus! But what is the secret of the power exercised by all these apostolic souls? It is that, having received, as their lives testify, this grace of holding converse with the Spouse, they have made noble efforts not to lose, through their own fault, the still more lofty grace of so Divine a union." [1]

These efforts of which the Saint speaks are the heroic care of seeking only God's glory and pleasure in all things.

It must be noticed that the solid virtues of which we have just spoken can only be acquired and preserved by means of a serious examen. Following the example, then, of the Saints who have attained the highest favors from God, souls raised to Contemplation must never cease to make examen. The Holy Ghost in Contemplation doubtless gives great light to see one's faults, but this passive state, of reception of the light, is not enough; to it must be added the active search of a serious examen.

[1] *Château intérieur*, 4e demeure, ch. 4, t. 3, p. 413.

St. Ignatius made reflection every hour, and leaving all other occupation, examined his conscience with the greatest care. If anything important prevented him from doing so for a moment, he did so immediately it was finished.[1] He went even further, for he compared one examen with the other, and one week with another.[2]

In spite of his numerous ecstasies and the extraordinary light God gave him about his slight faults, St. Francis Xavier used to examine his conscience several times a day.

St. Teresa left the following advice to her religious: "Every hour and at each of your actions examine your conscience. Then having seen your faults, try to correct yourself of them with God's help, and you will attain perfection." [3]

[1] Bollandists, t. 34, p. 562, n. 475.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 594, n. 911.
[3] *Avis à ses religieuses*, 27e avis, t. 2, p. 582.

## CHAPTER II

### THE SOUL CALLED TO CONTEMPLATION MUST KEEP ITSELF ENTIRELY FREE FROM ATTACHMENT TO CREATURES

THE *Imitation* asks:

" Why were certain of the Saints so perfect:

" So contemplative ?

" Because they strove to wholly mortify themselves,

" To all the longings of the world;

" And thus with all the marrow of their heart they could cleave to God.

" We are too busy with our passions:

" We are too careful of the things that pass.

" If we were wholly dead unto ourselves,

" And no wise entangled in our inner hearts:

" We then could relish even things Divine.

" And have some experience of heavenly Contemplation." [1]

And in another chapter, where he returns to the same subject, the author writes:

" He wished to freely fly,

[1] *Imitation*, Bk. I, ch. II.

" Who said:

" Who will give me wings like a dove,

" And I will fly and be at rest? [1]

" What more quiet than the single eye?

" And what more free,

" Than he who longs for nothing on earth?

" So must I pass all creation by, and wholly desert self,

" And stand in ecstasy of mind and see,

" That Thou, Creator of all, hast in Thee nothing like Thy creatures.

" And if one be not set loose from all creation,

" He cannot freely aim at things Divine.

" For therefore few souls are found contemplative,

" For there are few that know how

" Fully to seclude themselves from creatures and beings that will perish." [2]

An incontestable doctrine, for Contemplation is a special union of love with God. Now, God never unites Himself so intimately to a soul as when, being dead to the world, it gives itself entirely to Him. When a soul which knows God only by faith, without feeling the delight of His presence, easily turns towards

[1] Ps. 54: 7. [2] *Imitation*, Bk. 4, ch. 31.

creatures, whose charm it experiences, it is foolish, truly, but it is a folly which the weakness of human nature, always turning towards a tangible good, in a certain sense explains. But when a soul which has experienced in Contemplation the heavenly pleasure of God's presence, still stoops to creatures to find in them an earthly delight, it is such unseemly behavior that God punishes it by depriving it of this high favor.

So then, O contemplative souls, shun all attachment to creatures.

In the first place, cling to solitude and do not spread yourselves outside, either by seeking distraction in worldly news or by busying yourselves with what has not been entrusted to you. The essential character of Contemplation is heavenly peace. Now, how can one enjoy the peace of Heaven when one's attention is necessarily taken up with a thousand earthly matters?

Do I mean, then, that one must flee from the world and not think of it even when God's glory and one's neighbor's salvation so require? Not at all. But then one should only turn one's attention to it as far as is necessary. The attraction exercised by solitude must

always remain a weight, drawing the soul and leading it back to God. Such was the conduct of Saints like St. Bernard, St. Dominic, St. Francis, St. Ignatius, St. Francis Xavier and all the Saints in general.

You have a corruptible body, which weighs down the soul and prevents it from flying freely to God's bosom by means of Contemplation. Avoid what gives this body pleasure, what flatters its sight, hearing, taste and the other senses, or at least only seek in them a rest which is necessary for glorifying God. One must go still further: the Apostle could raise himself to the third Heaven only by bringing his body into subjection. This example must be followed and the practice of corporal mortification must be constant, though not excessive. If the body is enfeebled, the soul has no strength to raise itself to God in prayer.

Let us go further ahead. Every one of us is more or less anxious to be held in esteem by others. You absolutely must practise mortification in this respect, by offering God the entire sacrifice of your reputation. This holocaust demands from you the avoidance of all compliments and praise, according to Our

Lord's example. If, however, you cannot avoid them, take them, as Our Divine Master did, in referring all the honor to God.

And further still. Watch over the affections of your heart. Contemplation is a sublime exchange of love between God and His Spouse, the soul. Now it is the Bridegroom's privilege to be jealous of the undivided affection and love of His Bride.

When a soul which has been favored by supernatural favors stoops to natural affections without purifying them in the fire of the love of God, the heavenly Spouse is angered, the source of His graces dries up, and all progress in Contemplation immediately ceases.

In a word, the contemplative soul must avoid any self-complacency; this return of pride caused Lucifer's ruin. Does this mean that a contemplative soul is never to return upon itself? Not at all. It ought often to consider God's gifts, so as to thank and glorify Him for them. But it is one thing to reflect on oneself with the object of admiring oneself, and quite another thing when the object is to delight in God, and to sing, after the example of the most Holy Virgin: "My soul doth magnify the Lord!"

## CHAPTER III

### THE SOUL CALLED TO CONTEMPLATION AND WHICH WISHES TO MAKE REAL PROGRESS IN IT, MUST STRIVE AFTER INTIMATE UNION WITH JESUS CHRIST CRUCIFIED

"WHEN Jesus was transfigured on Thabor," says the Holy Gospel, "His face did shine as the sun; and His garments became white as snow.[1] And behold two men were talking with Him. And they were Moses and Elias, appearing in majesty. And they spoke of His decease that He should accomplish in Jerusalem." [2]

Why did Our Lord thus unite His glorious Transfiguration, a reflex of Heaven, and His ignominious death on the Cross? To teach us that Calvary is the road to eternal happiness. It is Calvary, too, which must be climbed in order to reach Contemplation, the true prelude to the life of Heaven. The soul will never be successful in this, unless it has a quite special devotion to Our Lord's Passion.

"If you wish to arrive at contemplative

[1] Matth. 17: 2. [2] Luke 9: 30, 31.

rest," says St. Bonaventure, "bring yourself as far as you can to compassionate the Passion of Jesus Christ and to carry Him everywhere in your heart. If, indeed, you cannot compassionate His suffering, you cannot rejoice with Him. If you meditate well upon His Passion and enter deep into the opening in His side, you will quickly arrive at His Heart. O happy heart which thus sweetly unites itself to the Heart of Jesus Christ! . . . O excellent heart, tell me, I beg, of the sweetness which you experience; hide not from me the delight with which you are overwhelmed. But, as I clearly see, you no longer hear what I say, for your heart is absorbed in an indescribable sweetness. . . . You are captivated by the excess of your happiness, you have no power of speech and your senses can no longer act. Whoever wishes to enter into the repose and sweetness of Contemplation by another door, must hold himself a thief and a robber." [1]

Let the facts speak for themselves. Among the Saints the greatest contemplative souls have all had a special devotion to Jesus crucified. Among Our Lord's Apostles, two received the gift of a more sublime Contempla-

[1] *Stimulus amoris*, pars 3, c. 1; t. 12, p. 677.

tion than the others, St. Paul and St. John. By what door did they enter? St. Paul was raised to the third Heaven. How did he attain this? "For I judged not myself to know any thing among you, but Jesus Christ; and Him crucified." [1] There is his answer.

"The Apostle St. John," St. Augustine tells us, "is rightly compared to the eagle, for the three other Evangelists walk on the earth with the Humanity of Our Lord, and have said little of His Divinity. But John, as if it cost him an effort to walk on the earth, from the very beginning of his discourse rises above the earth and all the expanse of air and heaven, nay, higher still, above the whole army of Angels and the whole assembly of the invisible powers and reaches Him, by Whom all things were made, saying: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." [2] That truly is the highest Contemplation. Now of all the Apostles, John is the only one who, at the foot of the Cross, was united to Jesus crucified by a holy and tender compassion.

Close to John on Calvary was Mary Magdalen, regarded by all the Saints as the perfect

[1] 1 Cor. 2: 2. [2] *Tract. 36 in Joan.*

model of a contemplative soul and the Church herself recognizes it in the legend of St. Martha:

"In order to enjoy by contemplating the heavenly beatitude, the better part she had chosen, Magdalen withdrew to a cave in a very high mountain. There she lived thirty years, raised daily to Heaven to hear the Angels' choirs." [1]

Now how did Mary Magdalen receive this signal grace? By incomparable union of love with Jesus crucified. Not only did she mount Calvary so as to compassionate the sufferings of her Divine Master, but more, after the holy women had departed from the empty tomb, she remained to weep at the remembrance of the sufferings of His Passion. Jesus, touched by her tears, came to console her by showing her the glory of His Resurrection.

Let us pass to the Saints who have rendered the Church especially illustrious by the sublimity of their prayer. St. Bernard was the greatest contemplative of the twelfth century. What gained him admittance into the rest and sweetness of Contemplation? He tells us in his forty-third sermon on the Canticle: "I

[1] *Breviary*, Lesson 5.

too, my brethren, from the beginning of my conversion have been careful to gather this little bouquet of myrrh to take the place of all the merits which I am sensible of having missed, and to place it on my heart. I have formed it of all my Saviour's pains and bitter griefs. First, of the privations which He suffered during His infancy; afterwards of the labor of His preaching, the weariness of His journeys, the nights spent in prayer, His temptations and sufferings, His tears shed in compassion, the snares laid for Him in conversation, dangers created by false brethren, outrages, spittings, buffets, mockings, reproaches, nails and like things, which He suffered for man's salvation, as the Gospel relates in numerous passages. . . . This is why that which I have often on my lips, as you know; that which I have always in my heart, as God knows; always in my writings, as one sees; that which is my sublimest philosophy, is to know Jesus and Jesus crucified." [1]

The great ecstatic of the thirteenth century was St. Francis of Assisi. By what door did he enter into the union of incomparable

[1] *Sermo 43 in Cantica*, circa med. et in fine.

love which marked the two last years of his life? After a fast of forty days on Mount Alvernus, Francis saw descend from Heaven a winged and crucified Seraph, whose appearance, full of grace, produced an excess of joy within him, and whose crucifixion pierced his soul with the sword of suffering. The vision taught this friend of Christ that he must be wholly transformed into the image of Jesus crucified, not by the martyrdom of the flesh but by the consuming fire of the soul.[1] The impression of St. Francis' stigmata sums up his whole life. It teaches us how the love of Jesus crucified was the source of all good to him, and especially during the two heavenly years which preceded his blessed death.

A century later, St. Catherine of Sienna appeared. From six years of age, she was transported in ecstasy, but the sublime prayer which is the cause of her being looked upon as the great contemplative of the fourteenth century, dates from the ecstasy of Pisa, where for a whole day she was thought to be dead. She was then twenty-seven years old. How did she enter upon this new and lofty road, about which, like St. Paul, she declared herself

[1] See St. Bonaventure's account in the *Breviary*, 17 September.

unable to speak? While she was still at Pisa, after being nourished with the Heavenly Food, she saw Our Crucified Lord coming towards her surrounded by a great light. Five rays shone from her Saviour's Wounds and fell upon her hands, her feet and her heart, and the pain which she experienced in consequence was so great that she would have died of it, if God had not supported her.[1] The door of the Contemplation to which she was raised during the last six years of her life was, then, the impression of the stigmata of Jesus crucified.

Let us conclude with St. Teresa. When she had begun to receive the graces of Contemplation, doubts arose in her mind, as usually happens, and she asked St. Francis Borgia's advice. His reply to her was, that for the future she ought always to begin prayer by a mystery of the Passion and that if afterwards Our Lord, without any effort on her part, raised her spirit to the supernatural state, she ought to yield herself to His guidance without fear.[2] Our Saviour's most holy Passion, then, was for Teresa the blessed

[1] Bollandists, t. 12, pp. 870, 908, 910, 911.
[2] *Vie par elle-même*, ch. 24, p. 278.

door by which she entered upon the path of Contemplation in a lasting manner.

In Holy Church, Jesus Christ's true Spouse, there will always be some privileged souls to whom the Holy Ghost grants contemplative graces. But let no mistake be made here. Except in exceptional cases, which come under no law, no one enters upon imperfect Contemplation without having generously answered Our Divine Master's call: "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me." [1] No one passes from imperfect to perfect Contemplation without having shared in the agony of Jesus on the Cross. Lastly, no one rises from perfect Contemplation to Consummated Union without bearing the sacred stigmata of Our Lord Jesus Christ imprinted upon his soul and sometimes upon his body. Special devotion to the Holy Passion of Jesus Christ is a signal grace obtained through the most Holy Virgin's blessed intercession, whose sweet soul was pierced by the sword of sorrows on Calvary. Let contemplative souls, then, who desire to respond fully to their holy vocation, bring themselves to have always on their

[1] Matth. 16: 24.

heart and frequently on their lips this all pious strophe of the *Stabat Mater:*

Sancta Mater, istud agas,
Crucifixi fige plagas,
Cordi meo valide!

## CHAPTER IV

### THE SOUL CALLED TO CONTEMPLATION AND WHICH WISHES TO MAKE REAL PROGRESS IN IT, MUST HAVE A SPECIAL DEVOTION TO THE HOLY EUCHARIST

"I AM the living bread, which came down from heaven," says Our Lord: "if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever. . . . He that eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, hath everlasting life." [1]

The Divine Master teaches us by these words that the Holy Eucharist is the Divine bread which nourishes the soul and gives it strength to reach Heaven. It is the same bread which gives the soul strength to reach the delightful rest of Contemplation, the dawn on earth of eternal happiness. Those who are called to this need a powerful aid in climbing the path which leads to it. They will find strength and courage in a very special devotion to the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar.

Facts have here a paramount importance. St. Dominic was a great contemplative soul.

[1] John 6: 51, 55.

He spent his nights in prayer and was sometimes transported in ecstasy. So powerful was his prayer that he could say he had never asked God for anything which he had not obtained. Now, his devotion to the Holy Eucharist was admirable. He often spent the whole night at the foot of the Tabernacle and when sleep forced him to take some rest, he stretched himself on the floor of the sanctuary.[1]

St. Ignatius prepared himself for celebrating the Divine Mysteries with an incomparable attention and he devoted two hours to his thanksgiving. Our Lord rewarded him by granting him at the altar the highest contemplative favors which the soul can attain in this life. " While I was celebrating," he says in his spiritual notes, " I saw the heavenly country and its Lord, and understood that there were Three distinct Persons and that the Second and the Third are in the Father.[2] During the Holy Sacrifice more copious tears than previously came to me, interrupted by sobs and accompanied by such light on the Holy Trinity that there seemed to me nothing

[1] Bollandists, t. 35, p. 596, nn. 218, 219.
[2] *Ibid.*, t. 34, p. 539, n. 626, ad. fin.

hidden in the mystery. During this Mass, while I was speaking of the Father, God knows, I knew, I felt, I saw, that He was a Person of the Most Blessed Trinity and I felt myself prompted to love Him more because the other Persons are present in Him in a special way." [1]

St. Philip Neri was the great ecstatic of the latter part of the sixteenth century, his devotion to the Holy Mass was admirable. While he was celebrating, his countenance was lit up by a heavenly light and those who were assisting felt themselves touched to the depths of their soul. Sometimes he was transported in ecstasy.[2]

St. Francis Borgia gave eight hours a day to Contemplation; while his devotion to the Holy Eucharist has made him famous. His countenance shone with a seraphic ardor during Holy Mass, and by a divine instinct he recognized the churches and tabernacles where Jesus Christ Our Lord was really present.[3]

St. Alphonsus Rodriguez, a lay brother of

[1] Bollandists, t. 34, p. 540, n. 629.
[2] Cardinal Capecelatro, *Vie de saint Philippe*, 1: 2, ch. 1.
[3] *Breviary*, 10 October.

the Society of Jesus, was raised to the highest Contemplation and he was insatiable in serving Mass.[1]

St. Paschal Baylon, a lay brother of the Friars Minor of the strict observance languished habitually with love and was often transported in ecstasy during prayer. In praise of his devotion to the Blessed Eucharist, it is enough to recall the fact that he was declared patron of all Eucharistic Confraternities by the Sovereign Pontiff, Leo XIII.[2]

St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi knew the most wonderful mystic ways. So ardent was her desire of receiving Jesus in the Sacrament of love, that no longer being able to restrain it, she used to say to her Daughters: "How many hours are left before Communion? Alas! if we loved Jesus, this time, although so short, would seem like a whole year." [3]

Ten years before her blessed death St. Teresa was raised to the highest of all contemplative graces, the favor of Spiritual Marriage. She had just received Communion from the hand of St. John of the Cross. Here

[1] *Breviary*, 30 October.

[2] *Ibid.*, 17 May.

[3] *Vie de sainte Marie Madeleine de Pazzi*, par le P. Cépari, ch. 17.

are her words: "It was at the moment when she (the Saint) had just communicated, that Our Lord showed Himself to her. He had that splendor, that beauty, that majesty which shone from Him after the Resurrection. He told her that it was time for her to think no more of what concerned herself, and that He would take care of her. He added other words which her heart can more easily feel than words express." [1] Then passing to the description of the incomparable union that Our Lord granted her, the Saint adds: "That wh ch God . . communicates to the soul in an instant, is such a great secret, such a high favor and transports the soul with such unutterable pleasure, that I know not with what to compare it. All I can say is that Our Lord at that instant wishes to show it the grandeur of the glory of Heaven in a sublime manner, which no vision or spiritual pleasure in any way resembles. As I conceive it, it is what I call the spirit of the soul becoming one and the same thing with God." [2]

So, then, O contemplative souls, prepare yourselves to receive the Bread of Angels

[1] *Château intérieur*, 7e demeure, ch. 2; t. 3, pp. 535. 536.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 537.

with all the devotion of which you are capable; give all the time allowed by the Rule to the Thanksgiving; go and visit Jesus in the Tabernacle during your free time. There, prostrated at His Feet, anticipate the wishes of His Divine Heart by praying for the Church, which He loved so well that He gave His Life for it, and make reparation for the injuries He receives in the Sacrament of love, by profound respect jo ned to the outbursts of a tender and compassionate heart. After that, know how to await the hour of the Holy Spirit. He will come sooner or later to visit you and cause you to make wonderful progress in Contemplation.

## CHAPTER V

### THE END WHICH GOD HAS IN VIEW IN RAISING A SOUL TO PERFECT CONTEMPLATION IS NOT ONLY TO LEAD IT TO THE DIVINE UNION, BUT FURTHER TO GIVE IT COURAGE TO WORK AND SUFFER MUCH FOR HIS GLORY

It is recounted in the Holy Gospel that Peter, contemplating Jesus transfigured on Thabor, said to Him: "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three tabernacles, one for Thee, and one for Moses and one for Elias." St. Luke adds: "not knowing what he said." [1]

Peter was wrong in thinking that the delights of the Contemplation on Thabor were granted him solely for his enjoyment, since he ought above all to have drawn courage from it to follow his Divine Master generously even to death. Alas! more than one contemplative soul has fallen into a like mistake and it is well to prevent evil.

Christian perfection admits of three degrees. (In the work on "Ordinary Prayer" Part 2,

[1] Luke 9: 33.

chapter 13, we gave another and better known division; but the one now given is equally true and better suits the subject treated here).

1. Working exteriorly for God, while the interior life is enough to maintain purity of intention. This is the least of all.

2. Remaining outside exterior works in order to apply oneself only to the exercise of the interior life, such as mental prayer, Divine Offices and spiritual reading. This degree is far superior to the first, since it is more perfect to be united to God Himself than to His creatures, with God in view.

3. Constantly dwelling in such a close union of love with God, that from its superabundance there flows an insatiable zeal for working for His glory and good pleasure. This is the most perfect way of imitating Our Lord, Who, while contemplating His Father face to face, said in the infinite excess of His love: "I honor My Father," [1] and: "I seek not My own glory." [2] And again: "That the world may know that I love the Father: And as the Father hath given Me commandment, so do I. Arise, let us go hence." [3] Here He was speaking of His Passion.

[1] John 8: 49. [2] John 8; 50. [3] John 14; 31.

Thanks be to God, this admirable perfection is often found in chosen souls led by the ordinary road of meditation; yet it is particularly the lot of contemplative souls, who can easily draw from the unspeakable delight of their extraordinary prayer the courage necessary for working and suffering much in God's service. The lives of the Saints prove this.

It was not only that he might enjoy heavenly delight that Moses was raised to the vision of the Divine Essence. He was to draw from it courage to deliver God's people from Egypt.

It is not only that the Apostles might experience the unspeakable joys of the Holy Ghost that they were enriched with His gifts and fired with His love on the day of Pentecost. In this delight from on high, they were to find strength to evangelize the world and to die martyrs.

It is not only that he might enjoy it that St. Paul was raised to the third Heaven, but that he might have strength to correspond with this call of Our Lord: " This man is to Me a vessel of election, to carry My name before the gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how

great things he must suffer for My name's sake."[1]

It is not only that he might taste indescribable sweetness that St. Ignatius was ravished in ecstasy forty times at Manresa, but that he might thus find the courage necessary to bear the imprisonment of Alcalà, the persecutions of Barcelona, Paris and Rome; in a word, that he might endure the great labors connected with the foundation of the Society of Jesus. It is the same in the case of St. Benedict, St. Dominic, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Bernard, St. Francis Xavier and many others.

To the Saints' example let us add their teaching. St. Thomas fully supports this doctrine. True, he wrote these words:

" The growth of merit with regard to eternal reward consists chiefly in charity, a sure sign of which is exterior work supported for Jesus Christ. Yet a much more express mark is found in the one who forgets all that concerns this life and places his happiness in giving himself up wholly to Contemplation."[2]

But a few pages further on he adds: " The actions of the active life are of two kinds:

[1] Acts 9: 15, 16. [2] $2^a\,2^{ae}$, q. 182, a. 2, ad. 1.

Some arise from the plenitude of Contemplation, such as teaching and preaching, . . . and they are more perfect than simple Contemplation. Just as it is more perfect indeed to shed light than to be simply luminous, so it is more excellent to share with others what has been contemplated than to confine oneself to Contemplation. The other actions of the active life consist entirely in exterior occupations, such as giving alms, offering hospitality and other things of this kind. These are less perfect works than Contemplation." [1]

The conclusion which the holy Doctor draws with regard to teaching and preaching applies equally to all work undertaken and to all suffering borne for God's glory. With St. Peter Claver, Contemplation gave rise to such a superabundance of love in his heart that for forty years he joyfully became the slave of the negroes of Carthagena. It was evidently more perfect than the ecstasies where the soul simply burns with Divine love, as a fire which causes a conflagration is more fierce than a furnace which burns out without throwing out any flames.

As to St. John of the Cross, he describes

[1] $2^a\ 2^{ae}$, q. 188, a. 6 in corp.

from his own personal experience the sublimest favors of the mystic union. The proof that these incomparable graces were not granted him only to unite him with God, is found in his heroic life. His apostolic works in behalf of the poor of Durvello, the prison of Toledo, the ecstasy of Segovia, where John answered Our Divine Master Who offered him the choice of a reward: "Lord, to suffer and be despised for Thee;" [1] there we have a voice which cries aloud: The sublime favors which I describe have been granted me that I might thence draw the courage to suffer and work much for God's glory.

St. Teresa, then, after having spoken of the highest favors of Contemplation, had abundant reason for saying: "By means of the effects of these great graces, if you have been careful, doubtless you have already perceived the end for which Our Lord grants them to certain souls in this world. Yet I think it is useful to speak of it here. It must not be imagined that Our Lord's aim is only to give them consolation and delight. That would be a great mistake, for the most marked

[1] *Vie de saint Jean de la Croix*, par le Père Jérôme de Saint Joseph, ch. 8, 10, 16.

favor that God can grant us in this world is to make our life like to that which His Son led when on earth. Thus I hold it certain that in granting these graces Our Lord, as I have sometimes said in this work, aims at strengthening our weakness, so as to enable us to endure great suffering, as He did. And, indeed, we see that it has always been those who were most like Our Lord Jesus Christ, who have suffered most. Think what His glorious Mother and His Apostles had to suffer. And a Saint Paul, whence did he draw the strength to endure such excessive labors? . . . Who can say how far a soul, in which Our Lord dwells in such a special manner, forgets its own rest! How little honors touch it! How far it is from wishing to be thought well of in the smallest thing!

"Being always in the company of its divine Spouse, as is right, how could it be mindful of itself? Its only thought is to please Him and to find means of proving to Him its love. This, my Daughters, is the end of prayer; and in God's designs, this Spiritual Marriage is only destined to produce incessant works for His Glory." [1]

[1] *Château intérieur*, 7e demeure, ch. 4; t. 3, pp. 555, 556.

All contemplative souls, then, must gird their loins and prepare themselves for hard work. The law is general—the method of complying with it alone differs. Without doubt, the labors of a St. Simon Stylites were not the same as those of a St. Francis Xavier; but both found in the fulness of their Contemplation the strength to work and suffer in a wonderful way for God's glory.

# PART IV

## Supernatural Visions and Speech

# CHAPTER I

## SUPERNATURAL VISIONS AND SPEECH: THEIR NATURE AND DIFFERENT CLASSES

We have seen that Contemplation essentially arises from charity and increases charity. It presupposes, therefore, the state of grace and sanctifies the soul.

It is not necessarily so with Visions and Speech: these are sometimes granted to sinners for their conversion. St. Paul was persecuting the first Christians when he heard these words: "I am Jesus Whom thou persecutest. It is hard for thee to kick against the goad." [1]

Sometimes even these words do not bring about conversion: Caiphas prophesied and the gift of prophecy did not change him in the least. It was revealed to St Margaret of Cortona, while leading a sinful life, that she would one day arrive at a high state of sanctity and yet she still continued in disfavor with God for a considerable time.

Supernatural Visions and Speech are di-

[1] Acts 9: 15.

vided into three classes: *Corporeal* Visions and Speech, where one sees and hears by means of the exterior senses, and which come either from the good or bad Angel, since God does not usually effect them Himself directly.

Visions and Speech *of the imagination*, where one sees and hears by means of the interior senses. God does not usually effect these, either, without a medium, and so they too come from the good or the bad Angel.

In practice, it is well to note that in the natural order one sees and hears more clearly by means of the exterior than by the interior senses. In the supernatural order, on the contrary, the interior Visions and Speech are much clearer and more vivid than the exterior. This is due to the good or the bad Angel's wonderful power over the imagination.

Words of the imagination almost always seem to be uttered in the depths of the soul. Sometimes, however, they seem to come from Heaven, or from close by.

Lastly, there are *intellectual* Visions and Speech, where one sees and hears after the manner of the Angels, without any help from the imagination. In this case, articulate words or a sensible sign will be looked for in

vain. God alone can be their author, Whose Almighty power is needed to make a soul, imprisoned in a mortal body, hear and see after the manner of the Angels.

Speech is more usual than Visions, the reason being that these supernatural graces are ordered by God for the spiritual good of the soul which receives them. Now, this good depends more on the hearing than on the sight. "Faith, then, cometh by hearing," says the Apostle.[1]

Finally, in supernatural Speech words of the imagination are much more usual than corporeal or intellectual words. They are more frequent than corporeal words because, since God's aim is the soul's sanctification, He employs by preference the imagination, which has more effect upon the intelligence than the corporal senses. It is more frequent than intellectual Speech, since this latter is much more miraculous. Now, God rarely works great miracles.

[1] Rom. 10: 17.

## CHAPTER II

### THE PRECAUTIONS TO BE TAKEN BEFORE PLACING FAITH IN SUPERNATURAL VISIONS AND SPEECH

Corporeal and imaginary Visions and Speech come either from the good Angel or from the devil. In these uncertain favors, then, one runs the risk of taking, as coming from the good Angel, what may really come from the bad. God alone, on the contrary, can be the cause of intellectual Visions and Speech. Yet even then all danger of illusion has not disappeared, for there are souls which take a simple but unusual attraction of grace for intellectual Speech. So whatever the nature of the Visions and Speech, vigilance and prudence are called for.

The first thing to be done is to examine whether the Visions and Speech have the characteristics of the good Spirit. These characteristics are seven in number.

#### *First Characteristic. Humility*

The good Spirit urges one not to take pride in the grace received and to keep it as secret

as possible. After God's apparition to Moses in the burning bush, he exclaims: "Who am I that I should go to Pharao?" [1] When Isaias had heard the songs of the Seraphim, he declared that his lips were unclean. After the miraculous draught of fishes, St. Peter exclaims: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." [2] And finally the Most Blessed Virgin, when visited by the Angel Gabriel, who announces to her the greatest of mysteries, answers: Behold the handmaid of the Lord." [3]

On the contrary, in similar cases the devil incites to the self-complacency which ruined the rebel angels, and to the display of these extraordinary favors.

*Second Characteristic. Obedience*

The good Spirit incites to obedience in execution and judgment. As soon as the Superior points out a fault needing correction, the work of eradicating it begins; as soon as he forbids a corporal mortification, it is dropped; when the Confessor gives a counsel, it is immediately adopted. The devil, on the contrary, stirs up obstinacy in ideas, the

[1] Ex. 3: 11. [2] Luke 5: 8. [3] Luke 1: 35.

doing of mortifications without permission and even in opposition to the Confessor's advice.

*Third Characteristic. The Observance of Rules and Community Life*

The good Spirit urges the scrupulous observance of the smallest rules, and the making of no exceptions to the community life, except in cases of necessity. The devil, on the other hand, urges that the rules and community life should be lightly regarded, under the specious pretext that one is being guided by a higher light. For instance, one will want to pray during the night but will ask to rise after the Community in the morning. Little food is taken, but a special diet is required, and so on.

*Fourth Characteristic. Peace of Soul*

The good Spirit produces a profound, delightful and heavenly peace in the soul, which is a preparation for union with God, in accordance with what is written: "And His (God's) place is in peace."[1] The devil, on the contrary, brings about trouble, since this state

[1] Ps. 75: 3.

of soul is favorable to sin, or at least prevents progress in virtue.

It must not be thought, however, that the good Spirit always begins by bringing about peace, for in many Visions He begins by putting a certain fear in the soul, which soon disappears and melts into a delightful peace. Divine Wisdom has thus ordained because fear gives rise to reverence for God—a very necessary quality when there is a question of receiving an exceptional communication from God. When the Angel of the Lord appears to Zachary, fear takes possession of him, but the Angel reassures him by saying: "Fear not, Zachary." [1] In the same way, when Our Lord appears to the Apostles in the Cenacle, they are troubled and afraid, but Jesus calms them by saying: "Peace be to you; it is I, fear not." [2]

Our Lord Himself wished to point out to St. Catherine of Sienna this sign which helps to distinguish between the good and evil spirit. "If you ask Me how it is possible to recognize what comes from the devil and what comes from Me, I answer you that it is by this sign: if it is the devil presenting him-

[1] Luke 1: 13. [2] Luke 24: 36.

self to the soul under the guise of light, the soul is overjoyed at it; but the longer the vision lasts, the more the joy diminishes, and soon only trouble, sadness and darkness, obscuring all the interior, are left. But if it is I, the Eternal Truth, visiting the soul, it experiences a holy fear at the first moment and together with this fear, joy, assurance and a sweet prudence, which is the cause that while doubting, it does not doubt." [1]

### *Fifth Characteristic. Purity of Action and Intention*

True Visions always bear the stamp of perfect purity, while false Visions incite to more or less misplaced liberties. Let no one raise as objection certain marks of excessive love given by Our Lord to St. Catherine of Sienna, St. Rose of Lima, Blessed Angela of Foligno, Blessed Margaret Mary and other privileged souls. From this holy familiarity there always comes something infinitely pure and akin to the incomprehensible love of the Son of God, which makes Him descend from Heaven upon the Altar and from the Altar into our heart, to there unite Himself with us.

[1] *Dialogue 71*, Poussielgue, 1885, t. 1, p. 179.

As to the affections in true Visions, the soul feels loved with the purest love. Visions of which the devil is the agent, on the contrary, bear the stamp of a troubled love which is not entirely chaste. "In vain," says St. Teresa, "will he (the devil) begin by making you enjoy a certain amount of pleasure. The soul rejects it with an indescribable horror. It finds the pleasure perfectly different from that which is experienced in a true Vision. Besides, the soul sees that the love shown does not bear the characteristics of a chaste and pure love, so that in a very short time it discovers and recognizes the enemy." [1]

*Sixth Characteristic. Dignity of Deportment and Address*

True Visions are always full of dignity and reserve. The words uttered are never empty, but always to God's glory and the salvation of souls. The devil, on the contrary, even when he attempts to take upon himself a virtuous exterior, always displays a something more or less out of keeping in his attitude and lingers over vain and useless words. If there is anything grotesque about the Vision, it

[1] *Vie par elle-même*, ch. 28; t. 1, p. 343.

is a sure sign that it proceeds from the devil, or an overwrought brain.

*Seventh Characteristic. Joy in Suffering*

True Visions inspire disgust for what nature loves and cause joy to be found in sickness, humiliation and ingratitude; in a word, in suffering. Visions of which the devil is the agent always savor more or less of the earth and are the cause of joy being sought in comfort, praise and honor.

Our Lord said to Blessed Angela of Foligno: "You will know that I am within you when you will not only be content to patiently suffer the evil which will be inflicted upon you and said about you, but when you will regard it on the contrary as a great benefit. This sign will fully assure you of God's grace." [1]

When a Vision has not all these characteristics of the good Spirit, it must be immediately rejected, as it comes from the devil or a deranged imagination. On the other hand, is a Vision or Speech which possesses all the characteristics of the good Spirit to be immediately accepted? Logically it would seem so,

[1] *Vie écrite par le Frère Arnauld*, ch. 5. Bollandists, t. 1, p. 200, n. 89.

and yet prudence gives a negative reply. Illusion is so easy in such matters that before giving a decided answer, the stamp of time must be awaited. A certain resistance to these supernatural manifestations must even be exacted from those who receive them. Such is the teaching common to the Saints.

St. Ignatius of Loyola used to say: "Visions and revelations, which often deceive and disturb the faint and feeble-hearted . . . should never be desired or asked for. Nay more, according to the counsel of the Saints and Masters of the spiritual life, one must always, as far as lies within one's power, shun them and be suspicious of them." [1]

St. John of the Cross thus expresses his opinion: "In the case of pious persons, the senses are sometimes struck by objects which are supernaturally presented to them. For instance, the eyes perceive the forms and persons of the other life, such and such a Saint, good or bad angels, marvellous light and splendor. The hearing perceives mysterious words, sometimes uttered by these apparitions, sometimes the source of which cannot be located. The smell is affected by

[1] Bollandists, *Vie de saint Ignace*, t. 34, p. 537, n. 614.

exquisite scents, whose source is unknown. In the same way these persons experience extraordinary sweetness in their taste, and their touch too feels a kind of pleasantness, such that it seems to them they are plunged in enjoyment to the marrow of their bones and that they are swimming in a torrent of delight. . . . Now it is important to know that although the extraordinary effects which may take place in the corporal senses are the work of God, one must never be self-complacent about them nor trust in them with certainty. Nay more, one must absolutely shun them, without examining whether they arise from a good or bad princip e. The more exterior and corporal they are, the less certain is it that God is their Author, for it is characteristic of His Being to communicate Itself to the spirit. There is more security and more real profit for the soul in interior graces than in sensible consolations, from which frequent errors can arise." [1]

St. Philip Neri recommended his followers to reject all these things (Visions and revelations) as far as they could, without fear of displeasing God. This resistance, he added,

[1] *Montée du Carmel*, 1: 2, ch. 11., t. 2, pp. 167, 168.

is one of the surest means one has of distinguishing between true and false visions.[1]

St. Alphonsus de Liguori says: "Every effort must be made to banish visions, speech and revelations. . . . Let the Confessor, then, order that they be unceasingly rejected, but always with humility and without any sign of disdain." [2]

Let it not be said that when a Vision bears all the characteristics of the Spirit of God, it is insulting God and depriving oneself of great graces to reject it. This argument has no value. Why?

In the first place, Visions do not fail to offer a certain danger to one's salvation. God usually allows that, if there are true ones, there should also be false ones. Man's life on earth is a warfare where God and the devil struggle for souls. If God makes use of Visions and Speech to attract them, is it not meet that He should allow the devil to attract them in the same way, and consequently, may one not predict that a soul which has true Visions will also have false ones? Now,

[1] *Vie de saint Philippe de Neri*, ch. 26. Bollandists, t. 19, p. 587, n. 375.

[2] *Homo apostolicus*, App. 1, n. 23.

God is pleased to have us reject even the best things for the sole reason that they might be a danger to the salvation of our soul. To act thus is to act with prudence, and as Our Lady did, when on hearing the Angel's salutation, she was troubled and asked herself what this salutation might mean.

In the second place, Visions bring honor. God makes use of them to clothe His servants with the reputation of sanctity, and the Church makes frequent mention of them in her Offices, to the glory of the Saints. Now, God is pleased to have us reject even the best things on the sole ground that they bring honor. Thus the Spirit of God urges men to flee from the Episcopacy, from being made Superiors, from important pulpits. Yet all these are very good things in themselves.

In the third place, Visions are very pleasant, while the life of pure faith is rough. Now God is pleased to have us prefer the bitter to the sweet for His love and following the example of Jesus Christ Our Lord.

Lastly, the Visions and revelations which have been most renowned in the Church, like those of St. Catherine of Sienna, of St. Teresa, of Blessed Margaret Mary, have

always been subjected to the test of contradiction. Hence it becomes clear that a revelation must always be suspected when it has not triumphed over numerous obstacles.

However, here, as in all things, prudence must be reasonable. If the Visions always continue, in spite of the resistance offered, and have the characteristics of the good Spirit, to persist in rejecting them would not be prudent zeal. They must be accepted with gratitude, humility and detachment.

With gratitude, since if God requires gratitude for ordinary graces, which He refuses to none, for a much stronger reason does He expect it for the extraordinary favors which He grants only to a few.

Gratitude is not enough, for while singing a hymn of thanksgiving to God, it is possible to add to it a hymn to one's own glory, like the Pharisee who said: "O God, I give Thee thanks that I am not as the rest of men." [1] Humility, then, must be added, which consists in holding oneself unworthy of such favors and consequently in not complaining when God withdraws them; in not preferring oneself to those to whom God does not grant

[1] Luke 18: 11.

like favors, and in not talking of them except in case of necessity, that is, in order to be directed. A very rare humility, for St. Philip Neri says: "It is difficult not to be puffed up with vanity in Divine Visions; more difficult to hold oneself little worthy of them; very difficult to believe oneself quite unworthy and not to prefer their sweetness to patience, humility and obedience." [1]

Again, gratitude and humility are not enough, since one may, even with these two virtues, become too attached to these Visions, which are only God's gift, and it is to God that one must be attached. It is imperative, then, to be detached from them, that is, not to recall their remembrance unless for grave reasons, such as to excite oneself to confidence during a period of discouragement; and in the next place, to esteem them less than solid virtues and sufferings borne from pure love of Jesus Christ.

This is the common teaching of the Saints. St. Ignatius of Loyola said: "When one has cut short all curiosity, esteem and desire for Visions and revelations . . . and God gratifies one by sending them, they must be

[1] Bollandists, t. 19, p. 587, n. 374.

accepted with fear, humility, thanksgiving and prudence." [1]

St. John of the Cross says: "If we have insisted so much on the necessity of rejecting Visions and revelations; if we have laid stress upon recommending Confessors not to encourage souls to this kind of communication, it is not because spiritual Directors are always obliged to hold them in dislike and disdain to such an extent as to give occasion to persons to be too reserved about them and to deprive them of the courage to manifest them. By thus closing the door upon their free manifestation, Directors expose these persons to a host of dangers. Besides, these graces are a means. Now, since it is a means and a way by which God conducts these souls, it is not fitting to disdain them and there is no reason to be afraid, still less to be scandalized. But one must proceed very gently, kindly and calmly, and encourage the souls by giving them the chance of clear explanation. If need be, one may even enjoin explanation upon them. Indeed, souls sometimes experience such great difficulty in making these declarations that nothing must be neglected

[1] Bollandists, *Vie de saint Ignace*, t. 34, p. 537, n. 614.

to bring them to make them. Afterwards they must be directed in the sure road of faith, taught to turn their eyes from all these supernatural gifts and encouraged to detach their mind and heart from them, so as to have free scope in reaching the heights of perfection. They must, in fine, be convinced that a single action or act of the will performed through love has more value before God than all heavenly Visions and revelations, and that many souls who are not enriched with like favors are, beyond a doubt, infinitely further advanced than others who have received a profusion of them." [1]

St. Alphonsus de Liguori is of the same opinion. A Carmelite prioress wrote to him, saying: "I am the victim of numberless fears and hesitations, and, according to many Directors, I am the dupe of deceptive illusions." The Saint answered her: "The Directors who have spoken thus to you have done so for a good purpose and they have followed the general rule that souls favored by God must be humiliated and kept under to defend them from pride. But this rule does not apply to your soul. You do not pose as an ecstatic

[1] *Montée du Carmel*, 1: 2, ch. 22; t. 2, pp. 299, 300.

or a prophetess; you do not go hither and thither opening your secret self to those about you, as other people do, who thus cause strong suspicion that they are both deceived and deceivers. You speak of this, as I believe, solely when it is necessary to do so and to ask help and advice. On the other hand, Our Lord gives you light enough to show you what you are and what you deserve in return for your faults and miseries. Why fear, then, that the devil is deceiving you? The devil? It is God, God who inspires you and ceaselessly urges you, for He wishes you to be wholly His."[1]

Let us conclude by a remarkable instance which fully confirms all this doctrine. In 1582 a young Neapolitan girl named Ursula Benincasa, who later on became the foundress of the Theatines, and whose virtues were declared heroic by Pius VI, heard Our Lord tell her to go to the Pope, Gregory XIII, and warn him to be more vigorous in reforming discipline and morals. The Sovereign Pontiff did not reject the advice, but wishing to proceed with prudence, he appointed a commission to examine Ursula's spirit. This commission, composed of cardinals and men

[1] *Lettre 143*, Desclée, 1888, t. 1, p. 251.

of the greatest worth, such as Father Claude Aquaviva, General of the Society of Jesus, referred the matter to the judgment of St. Philip Neri, the oracle of Rome. At the very first meeting, he summoned the maiden who had had the Ecstasy, and in order to try her, addressed her before the whole assembly as a " proud, ignorant, lying, hypocritical woman possessed by the devil." Ursula answered that she deserved every reproach and that her only desire was to be cured if she was the devil's dupe. As St. Philip was not convinced by the great humility with which Ursula received this test, he continued to mortify her for seven months, even going so far as to deprive her of Mass and Communion and to threaten her with the Inquisition. At length the maiden's humility, obedience and gentleness conquered all doubts and Gregory XIII, convinced that the warning came from heaven, appointed a new commission composed of four cardinals, among whom was St. Charles Borromeo and Blessed Paul of Arezzo. The great and salutary fruits which resulted for the Church clearly proved that the finger of God was there.[1]

[1] *St. Philip Neri*, by Cardinal Capecelatro, Bk. 3, ch. 4.

## CHAPTER III

### FIVE WAYS IN WHICH GOD SPEAKS SUPERNATURALLY TO SOULS AND HOW THEY SHOULD RECEIVE THESE EXTRAORDINARY FAVORS

*First way.* The words, either corporeal, imaginary or intellectual, instantly accomplish what they mean. For instance, a soul still attached to the vanities of earth hears these words: "Henceforth I wish you to be attached only to Me." Immediately it loses all attraction for creatures. Or again, a soul which is overwhelmed by an agony of fear which seems as though it must last for ever, hears these simple words: "It is I, fear not." It instantly finds itself filled with a cloudless peace and heroic courage, without knowing how. These words, which in an instant change a soul's state, are evidently always very precious, but sometimes they are of incomparable power. In a moment they raise a soul to high sanctity, as was the case with Abraham, according to St. John of the Cross. God said to him: "Walk before Me, and be perfect." [1] These words at once pro-

[1] Gen. 17: 1.

duced the most eminent sanctity in the great Patriarch.

A similar prodigy is found in the life of St. Teresa. One day she heard these words: "I wish you to hold no more converse with men but only with the Angels. May God be everlastingly blessed," she adds, "for having given me in a moment the liberty which I could not have gained in many years, although I had often done myself such violence that my health had greatly suffered from it. As this was the work of the All-Powerful and true Master of all creatures, I experienced no pain." [1]

In these cases, illusion is impossible. Only the hand of the All-Powerful can effect such a change in an instant. All the soul has to do is to receive this signal grace with humility and gratitude.

As a rule, the words which transform a soul are few, but they enter so deeply into the memory that they never leave it. They are most often imaginary and the soul hears them in its very depths.

*Second way.* Words spoken to the soul for its instruction, referring either to the mysteries

[1] *Vie par elle-même*, ch. 24; t. 1, pp. 282, 283.

of faith or to the meaning of a passage of Scripture, or to the excellence or practice of a particular virtue.

Sometimes it is neither God nor the good Angel who utters those words, but the soul which says them to itself, as we are in the habit of doing when holding an interior discussion with ourselves. The soul is right, however, in attributing them to God in a certain sense, since it pronounces them under the influence of a special supernatural light and with the particular help of the Holy Ghost. This help does not, however, amount to infallibility, but allows of possible errors. Besides this, the devil may also play his part. Such words, then, must not be unreservedly accepted nor without the control of learned and competent men. They are of much less value than the preceding, for they do not create virtue in the soul but only give an impetus towards its acquisition.

*Third way.* Words expressing a clear and distinct command. St. Aloysius of Gonzaga heard a voice directing him to join the Society of Jesus. St. Teresa received the command to work for the reform of the Carmelites; Blessed Margaret Mary to spread devotion

to the Sacred Heart. Here again illusion is easy and in order to prevent oneself from falling into it, these words must be submitted to the rigid censure of the reason and to the judgment of prudent and learned men.

*Fourth way.* Our Lord asks a soul to show Him its desires. It is His love which makes Him speak and He cherishes this soul and cannot refuse it anything. As a rule, these words are only heard by souls who have reached great sanctity and who have rendered their Divine Master conspicuous service. St. Thomas heard Our Lord say to him while he was praying at the foot of his crucifix: " You have written well of Me, Thomas; what reward do you wish? " In the same way St. John of the Cross was questioned by Our Lord as to the reward he wished for in return for so many labors undertaken for God's glory.

As a rule, the Holy Ghost suggests the answer. St. Thomas replied: " Lord, I only ask for Thee as my reward; " St. John of the Cross: " Lord, to suffer and to be despised for Thee; " Blessed Margaret Mary: " Lord, that which will procure Thee more glory."

If, as is the exception, a soul does not feel

drawn by any wish, it would be well to say simply: "Lord, what is most in conformity with Thy glory and Thy good pleasure."

*Fifth way.* God manifests the hidden present or future. When it is a question of the present, the manifestation is called revelation; of the future, prophecy. Let us speak first of revelations. They are of different kinds: knowledge of what is taking place at a distance; an insight into the conscience of others; knowledge of the state in which souls find themselves after death, in Hell, Heaven or Purgatory. St. Pius V is present in spirit at the Battle of Lepanto; St. Teresa sees Blessed Azevedo and his thirty-nine Companions in martyrdom going up to Heaven. St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi openly reads the souls of her novices; St. Teresa and Blessed Margaret Mary see people whom they knew on earth, in Purgatory.

It is useless to prove how the knowledge of the hidden present may include illusion, and consequently it is needless to recommend to the Director the greatest prudence. Yet this prudence must not result in a foregone conclusion never to accept or approve, no matter what may be the signs of credibility. It is

certain that there are true revelations, sent by God to be made public. For instance, the revelations made to Blessed Margaret Mary relative to the Souls in Purgatory had as their end either the consolation of a family or the obtaining of prayers.

In practice, therefore, the Confessor must first show himself very prudent and reserved in approving the truth of the matter, still more so in allowing it to be communicated to others. If he thinks finally that he should grant this permission, let him not, as a general rule, take it upon himself to make the communication, but let the one who has received the revelation do this.

Let us pass to prophecies. They can lend themselves to many an error, which in general is the result of one of the three following causes:

First, there are some spirits so unevenly balanced and souls so foolishly vain that they will not hesitate to make more or less apparently tempting prophecies, in order to attract attention. Every one knows how many such predictions, which never come true, give the impious the opportunity of deriding the holiest things.

In the second place, the prophecies may come from the devil. If, unhappily, they come true, the devil by means of his natural wisdom having guessed right, the Director and the disciple, who have been imprudent enough to conclude from this fact that the prophecies came from the good Spirit, find themselves in a very dangerous position.

Lastly, even in the prophecies whose Author is God, there is room for error, since they may be wrongly interpreted. The prophecies of Holy Writ are Divine. Yet the Church must explain them. How, then, can one dare to affirm that prophecies made to individuals do not need explanation? Both as regards the prophecies of Holy Writ and the prophecies true in themselves which have been made to individuals, the false interpretations at all times have been numerous.

David says, when speaking of Jesus Christ Our Lord: " He shall rule from sea to sea and from the river unto the ends of the earth." [1] The Jews, even the disciples of Our Divine Master, interpreted this passage as signifying an earthly kingdom, and were greatly mistaken.

[1] Ps. 71: 8.

Jonas went through Ninive repeating: "Yet forty days, and Ninive shall be destroyed." [1] The forty days went by and Ninive was not destroyed. The prophecy was only conditional: Ninive shall be destroyed unless it does penance. The prophet Jonas had taken a simply conditional prediction for absolute. He was mistaken.

Blessed Joan of Arc is in prison. St. Catherine appears to her and announces help. Joan thinks she means her deliverance and that she will leave the prison in which she is shut up. It was indeed a question of deliverance, but of a very different kind. Joan was to escape, not the hands of the English but the misery of this life by a glorious martyrdom. In St. Catherine's prediction she had misinterpreted the word "help."

St. Vincent Ferrer, when preaching at Salamanca, announced the end of the world as at hand. In order to prove the truth of this prediction he raised a woman to life who had been dead two days, and yet the end of the world did not arrive. The prophecy, like that of Jonas, was conditional. Penance was

[1] Jon. 3: 4.

done in the principal kingdoms of Europe and the chastisement was avoided.

The fixed determination to reject all prophecies, however trustworthy their signs of credibility, would be neither reasonable nor Christian. However, the Director should show himself very slow in giving his approbation, and especially in allowing them to be made public; and lastly, he will not take upon himself the responsibility of proclaiming them.

## CHAPTER IV

### ST. IGNATIUS' RULE FOR AVOIDING ILLUSIONS IN THE USE OF SUPERNATURAL SPEECH

St. Ignatius begins by laying down this principle: "It belongs to God alone to give consolation to the soul without preceding cause, for it is the property of the Creator to enter, go out and cause movements in the soul bringing it all into love of His Divine Majesty. I say without cause, without any previous sense or knowledge of any object through which such consolation would come through one's own acts of the understanding and will." [1]

Doubtless, we can make our soul pass from desolation to consolation, but not in an instant, by the sole command of our own free will. We are of necessity obliged to have recourse to reflections, reasoning and numerous acts of the will, and this requires a certain amount of time.

In the same way, the good and the evil spirit can produce joy in a troubled soul, by

[1] *Spiritual Exercises*, Discernment of Spirits, Week 2, Rule 2.

playing upon the understanding and the will, like orators. But that again requires more or less time. God only, by His Almighty Power, can change the soul's state in a moment. If, then, the passage from desolation to consolation is instantaneous, God's finger is certainly there. Souls conducted along the usual road have no other sign, and it is, strictly speaking, sufficient.

In the case of souls led by the extraordinary road of Contemplation, they have a second sign of great value added to the former —the very nature of the sudden consolation, which St. Ignatius describes in the following terms: " It happens very often that Our Lord moves and urges our soul to such and such an undertaking. He does so by opening our soul, that is, by speaking in it without any noise of words, and by raising it wholly and entirely to His Divine Love, without its being possible for us, even when we would, to resist the feeling which He puts within us."[1] Here will be recognized the perfect Contemplation of which God alone can be the Author.

St. John of the Cross, when treating of the same subject, says: " This sublime and loving

[1] *Première lettre à la sœur Rigadelle*, lettre 8, pp. 42,43.

knowledge of God belongs to the unitive state. It is the union itself and consists of a mysterious touch of the Divinity on the depths of the soul. . . . The devil cannot enter into a favor at the same time so elevated and so profound. He remains always powerless to penetrate into the soul's interior and to suddenly transform and enflame it with love, as do the visits of the Well-beloved." [1]

This principle stated, St. Ignatius draws from it the following conclusion, so very useful for the direction of the souls led by the path of Contemplation: " When the spiritual consolation is without any previous cause, it is certain that it is free from all illusion, since, as we have said, it can only come from God. Yet the person who receives this consolation must be very attentive and watchful in distinguishing the exact time of the consolation from that which immediately follows. At this latter time, when the soul is still all fervent and, as it were, penetrated by the precious remains of the consolation passed, by means of its own reasoning, as a result of its natural habits, and in consequence of its conceptions and judgments, it forms, under the influence

[1] *Montée du Carmel*, Bk. 2, ch. 26, t. 2, p. 319.

of the good or evil Spirit, resolutions and decisions which it has not received directly from God Our Lord and which, in consequence, must be well examined before placing implicit faith in them and putting them into practice." [1]

As one sees, St. Ignatius distinguishes between two periods of time: the first, that very short moment when the soul raised to perfect Contemplation is ingulfed in God. Then it is no longer the soul that lives but God Who lives in it. All error is impossible. The second period of time is that which immediately follows. The intellect and the will being no longer absorbed by the knowledge and love of God, one may give ear to interior words having as their author either the soul itself, the good Angel, or the devil. None of these words are infallible.

In the first place, the interior words which the soul speaks to itself are not infallible, because the human intellect is liable to mistake. Let no one urge that during this second period, where the soul is still entirely penetrated by the remains of perfect Contemplation, it is helped in a special way by the

[1] *Spiritual Exercises*, Discernment of Spirits, Week 2, Rule 8.

Holy Ghost. That is true, but assistance is one thing, infallibility another.

As to the good Angel, he evidently intends to give us good counsel, but he is sometimes ignorant of the mysterious designs of Divine Wisdom and can then only point out in a likely way that which is most to God's glory. Thus it is that the Angel Gabriel and the Persian Angel were not of the same mind as to the advisability of the return of the Jews from Babylon to Jerusalem.[1] Here too, then, there was no infallibility.

Lastly, not only can the devil make a mistake, but his constant wish is to lead us into error. The conclusion is obvious: before putting the resolutions and decisions taken during this second period into execution, they must be seriously examined and judged by one or more prudent, learned and supernatural men.

St. Ignatius only speaks of a work to be done, and with reason, for if it is only a question of impulse towards virtue, such minute examination would not be necessary. Even though the devil transformed himself into an angel of light, the impulse would

[1] Daniel, 10: 13.

be useful to the soul, provided it receives it with humility and gratitude towards the Divine Bounty. The wicked angel will depart baffled.

# PART V

## Vocation to Extraordinary Graces

# CHAPTER I

## CONTEMPLATION IS NOT THE ONLY MEANS OF ATTAINING CHRISTIAN PERFECTION

SANCTITY consists essentially in the transformation of our will into the Divine Will. No one disputes this point. Now this transformation may be obtained without the grace of Contemplation, and by Meditation alone. Such is the opinion of the Saints and masters of the spiritual life most versed in this matter.

Let us cite some authorities:

St. Ignatius of Loyola writes to Doctor Emmanuel de Miona, his former Confessor at Alcala and Paris: "I beg of you twice, three times over, and as many times as is possible for the service of God to do what I have told you, so that Our Divine Master may not one day reproach me for not having urged you with all the strength in my power, in as much as the Spiritual Exercises are the best I can conceive of, feel or understand in this life, either as regards the advancement man may draw from them for himself, or as

regards the fruit, help and spiritual advantage that he can draw from them for others." [1]

Thus, according to St. Ignatius, the *Spiritual Exercises* are the best that can be conceived of in this life for the soul's advancement. Hence it must be concluded that their methods of prayer, all of which be ong to Meditation, are enough for reaching the summit of Christian perfection. Contemplation, therefore, is not necessary for its attainment.

St. Francis of Sales says: 'Happy they who lead a superhuman, ecstatic life, raised above themselves, although they are not transported above themse ves in prayer. There are many Saints in heaven who were never in ecstasy or transported in Contemplation; for how many Martyrs and great Saints, both men and women, do we not see in history, who never received any favor in prayer beyond that of devotion and fervor? But there never was a Saint who had not had ecstasy and transport of life and work, overcoming himself and his natural inclinations." [2]

St. Alphonsus Liguori says: " Passive union

[1] *Lettres*, Lettre 10, p. 50.
[2] *Amour de Dieu*, 1: 7, c. 7, t. 5, p. 31.

is not necessary in order that a soul should attain perfection; it is enough for it to have reached active union. . . . Active union is perfect conformity of our will with that of God, in which consists without the slightest doubt all the perfection of the love of God." [1]

St. Teresa thus expresses her opinion: " There is not a single Christian who cannot, with the aid of grace, arrive at true union, provided he makes every effort in his power to give up his own will in order to attach himself to God's will alone. Oh! how many there are who say and firmly believe that they are in these dispositions As for me, I assure you that if they are, they have obtained what they might wish for from God. They should not trouble about that delicious union of which I first spoke. For what is best about it is that it springs from the one of which I am now talking, and it is even impossible to attain the first if one does not possess the second: I mean that entire submission of our will to that of God. How much to be desired is this latter union! How happy the soul which possesses it! What rest it will enjoy, even in this life! . . . For this union of pure

[1] *Homo apostolicus*, App. 1: 16.

conformity with the will of God to exist, it is not necessary for the powers to be suspended. God, Who is All-Powerful, has a thousand ways of enriching souls and leading them to these dwelling places, without making them pass by the shortened road of which I have spoken, I mean without raising them to that union with Him from which, after a few moments, they come out wholly transformed. But remark well, my Daughters, that in every case this mystic worm must die and that in this union of pure conformity to the Divine Will, its death must cost you more. Indeed, in this supernatural union, where the soul experiences such great delights in God, the happiness which it finds in living a life so new greatly helps in bringing about the death of this worm; while in the union of conformity, the soul must kill it itself without passing outside its ordinary life. I admit, my Daughters, that this latter state is much more painful than the former, but the reward will be so much the greater if you come out from the struggle victorious. And we shall conquer, without the slightest doubt, provided our will be truly united to that of God. That is the union I have longed for all my life

and which I have always begged from Our Lord." [1]

In another part, the Saint says: " Without being contemplative, she (a nun) will not fail to be very perfect if she faithfully performs what has been said. She can even excel the others in merit, because she will have more work to do at her own cost. The Divine Master, treating her as a valiant soul, will add to the joys which He has reserved for her in the other life, all the consolations she has not enjoyed in this.[2]

" There is always more safety in humility, mortification, detachment and the other virtues. As there is no danger in this path, provided you are faithful in following it, have no fears about attaining perfection just as well as the greatest contemplatives." [3]

After the Saints, listen to two other writers of great authority:

In his masterly treatise on the *Canonization of Saints*, Benedict XIV gives as a rule to the Sacred Congregation of Rites these words of Cardinal de Lauria: " We remark that many

[1] *Château intérieur*, 5[e] demeure, ch. 3, t. 3, pp. 402, 403.
[2] *Chemin de la perfection*, ch. 18, t. 3, p. 105.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 107.

perfect men are canonized even when there has been no mention made in their process of infused Contemplation. But proof is always brought forward of virtues possessed in a heroic degree and of miracles." [1]

Alvarez de Paz thus expresses his view: "All the perfect are not raised to perfect Contemplation, as I think I have said elsewhere, since Almighty God has other ways of making perfect men and Saints. He attracts some in a marvellous way by means of afflictions, sickness, temptations and persecutions. He forms others by the labors of an active life and the ministry for souls exercised with very pure intentions. He leads others to great sanctity by means of ordinary prayer and mortification in all things. And so it happens that one who is favored with great gifts of Contemplation finds himself inferior to another who has not received them. There are perfect men, too, to whom God refuses this gift because their temperament is not calm enough for Contemplation . . . to others, so that they may give themselves up entirely to the conversion of souls, from which extraordinary prayer and ecstasies

[1] *Opera omnia*, 1: 3, c. 26, 8. Prati, 1840, t. 3, p. 297, 8

somewhat deter them; to others, in order to humiliate them for fear lest they should esteem themselves too highly and lest they should become too proud of these brilliant gifts; to others, at length, in order to fulfil the secret provisions of Holy Providence, which it is not given us to know." [1]

In conclusion, all spiritual writers, both mystic and ascetic, are agreed in affirming that Contemplation is a very powerful means of attaining perfection, but the preceding evidence shows that it is not the only one. So, then, the souls which have not received the gift of Contemplation are not to lose courage but to generously enter on the common path which has been pointed out to them and be assured that they will thus attain sanctity.

[1] *Œuvres*, t. 3, 1: 5, deuxième partie, c. 4. Moguntiæ, 1619, p. 1692.

## CHAPTER II

### CONTEMPLATION REQUIRES A SPECIAL VOCATION WHICH THE GREATER NUMBER OF SOULS WHO MAKE MENTAL PRAYER DO NOT POSSESS

Reason teaches us nothing on this subject, nor does Holy Writ. To prove the point, then, one must have recourse to the experience of the Saints and masters of the spiritual life. Let us hear their evidence.

First of all St. Bernard: "When you have had long practice in these virtues, ask that the light of devotion may be given you—that day of perfect serenity, that sabbath when, like a retired soldier, you will live without toil in the midst of all your labors and with gladdened heart, and will run the way of God's commandments. From that time on you will perform with the utmost delight and great pleasure what you formerly did under compuls on and with sorrow. . . . But unless I am mistaken *few* reach this perfection in this life; . . . *many* aspire to it all their life long without ever attaining it. . . . Yet

if they persevere in their pious efforts, as soon as they have breathed their last sigh they will receive what was wisely refused them during this life. Then grace by itself will lead them where they formerly strove to go by its help and in a short life they will fill the course of many years." [1]

St. Lawrence Justinian, whose heavenly teaching the Church extols,[2] writes: "Prayer is feeble and lifeless without grace, but aided by grace it is a great help. . . . Those who have deserved to receive the love of prayer and inclination to devotion know this. I say this because all who pray do not reach an elevated prayer. Prayer, indeed, has grades by which spiritual men raise themselves, become dear to God and approach Him, not in body but in spirit." [3]

St. Ignatius of Loyola used to say that the methods taught in his *Spiritual Exercises* were suited to the majority of souls who practise mental prayer. On the other hand, it is certain that all these methods belong to the active order. The Saint believed, then, that

[1] *Sermo tertius de Circumcisione*, circa finem.
[2] *Breviary*, 5 September.
[3] *Tractatus de perfectionis gradibus*, c. 12, Opera Basileæ, 1560.

the greater number of souls who practise prayer are called to do so in an active manner.

St. Alphonsus de Liguori, who was very conversant in the experimental knowledge of extraordinary graces, says: " The souls who are conducted by God in supernatural ways are, according to St. Teresa, very few and we shall see many in Heaven who, although they have not received these supernatural graces, will have higher places than others who have received them." [1]

The holy Doctor, accordingly, in his book entitled *The True Spouse of Jesus Christ*, speaks at length of active mental prayer and devotes only a few lines to passive prayer.

St. Leonard of Port Maurice has written an excellent little work entitled: *Guide for a nun who aspires to perfection.* It insists at length and with emphasis on active prayer, where the three powers of the soul, memory, understanding and will, are exercised; but he keeps an absolute silence on all that concerns passive prayer.[2] This reticence on the part of a Saint who had learnt by experience the highest supernatural paths cannot be explained except

[1] *Homo apostolicus*, App. I, n. 16.

[2] *Guide d'une religieuse*, 2e p., C. 3, Casterman, 1887, p.107.

by the conviction he held that the greater number of religious women are not called to passive prayer.

Benedict XIV, of whom we have already spoken in the preceding chapter, again summarizes his opinion in these words of Cardinal de Lauria: "It is well known that the souls raised to Contemplation, especially infused Contemplation, are very rare; whilst those who devote themselves to Meditation are countless." [1]

I will conclude with the evidence of Venerable Father Louis Da Ponte, a very experienced man in these questions.

He speaks several times in passing of this subject, but in the fifteenth chapter of the *Life of Father Balthasar Alvarez* he expressly treats of it in these words: "Intimate and familiar converse with God and the gift of tranquil and perfect Contemplation, such as we have described, are so lofty a gift that Fr. Balthasar could not have attained it without a special vocation from Our Lord, as he himself bears witness in his statement. It is Our Lord, indeed, Who calls to this intercourse whom He wills, when He wills, and as He

[1] *Opera*, Prati, 1840, t. 3, p. 297, 8.

wills, without there being any place, year or fixed time for it. His only rule is His most Holy Will. He makes it His delight to hold converse with the children of men, but more particularly still with some rather than with others, by means of a grace and special privilege which we call vocation. It is an inspiration, a movement, a powerful affection which He stamps upon the soul and by means of which He turns it to this lofty form of prayer, at the same time giving it the aptitude and capacity for it. For all are not called to it, all are not fitted for it and it would be rash and presumptuous to aspire to it. . . . The mass of the faithful who are less enlightened or less capable or much taken up with temporal affairs, are called only to vocal prayer and the general and, as it were, far off consideration of some of the divine mysteries, principally those which inspire a holy fear of God and awe of His rigorous justice and so urge men to give up their sins.

" Others of the faithful, represented by the Seventy Ancients, are called by God to draw nearer to Him by the exercises of mental prayer, a deeper meditation on the Divine mysteries and more burning affections of love

and confidence. . . . To this class belong religious and secular persons who walk the ordinary path of mental prayer, a path of which the safety, necessity and abundant fruits will be proved. . . . But there are others, although a *small band*, who are represented by Moses and whom Our Lord in a quite special vocation raises to the highest degree of prayer and union with His Divine Majesty. He makes them enter the heavenly darkness and the cloud which blinds the eyes, so as to prevent them seeing the things of earth, and He opens their eyes that they may contemplate their Creator, with Whom they hold an intimate and familiar converse which is accompanied by great pleasure—to some more, to others less, according as He deigns to communicate Himself to His creatures." [1]

An important question remains to be settled. Do all souls called to Contemplation reach its highest point, namely perfect Contemplation? The greater number of these souls do not.

Three causes are generally assigned.

[1] Ven. Fr. Louis Da Ponte, *Vie du P. B. Alvarez*, ch. 15, Bouix, 1873, pp. 159, 161 and 162. The virtues of Ven. Louis Da Ponte were declared heroic by Clement XIII in 1759.

First, absence of vocation. All the souls which have received a vocation to the religious life are not called to heroism in it. All the souls which have received a vocation to Contemplation are not called to that which is highest in it. "Let us not presume," says St. John of the Cross, "to receive these sublime touches of knowledge and of love before we have undergone numerous tribulations and supported the greatest burdens of painful labor and purification. Yet such a rigorous purification is not necessary to attain the lower degrees of perfection, beyond which the greater number of souls are not called to pass." [1]

Next, it is the want of generosity and correspondence with grace which is the obstacle to certain souls:

"Great is my sorrow," says St. Teresa, "when, out of so many souls who to my knowledge reach that point (the prayer of quiet) and who ought to pass beyond, I see so small a number who do, that I am ashamed to speak of it. . . . Those who find within them such a gift from God may justly look upon themselves as God's friends. It only

[1] *Nuit obscure*, 1: 2, ch. 12, t. 3, p. 400.

remains for them to immolate themselves for His sake with the devotion which a noble friendship, even in the world, imposes." [1]

Lastly, souls are to be found who make no progress because they lack a virtuous, learned and experienced Director. These are the indeed remarkable words of St. John of the Cross:

"When God begins to shed this intimate unction upon the soul which is the result of a loving, sweet, peaceful, retired knowledge, far removed from the senses and thoughts natural to the human mind, He keeps it in this state without allowing it to taste or to meditate upon any truth of Heaven or earth, because He wholly absorbs it in this precious unction which inclines it to solitude and rest. Then will come one of those Directors who knows only how to give great blows with his hammer, like a blacksmith on his anvil, and, since he knows no other doctrine, he will speak like this: 'Nonsense, move on and give up this method; you are losing your time. All this is only sloth. Take a subject of prayer and meditate upon it. Make acts—you must do something of your own and stir

[1] *Vie par elle-même*, ch. 15; t. 1, pp. 160, 161.

yourself up. The rest is all an illusion and vain amusement.' Since these Directors are ignorant of the degrees of prayer and the ways of the spirit, they do not see that the acts with which they mean to overburden the soul have already been made, and that the way along which one passes with the help of reasoning has been gone over from beginning to end. . . . Not understanding that this soul has entered upon the life of the spirit, where there is no longer reasoning or feeling, where God acts upon it in a very intimate manner by speaking to its heart in solitude, they add to the divine unction, human unction arising from ordinary knowledge and common consolations with which they force the soul to nourish itself. Thus, they make the soul lose, together with solitude and recollection, the wonderful painting which God was working to perfect in it. Hence the result is that the soul does not do what is required of it on the one hand, because that has become impossible to it, and on the other hand, that it does not profit either of what God wanted to do in it." [1]

The greater number of souls called to Contemplation, then, do not reach perfect Con-

[1] *Vive flamme d'amour*, Str. 3, vers 3, n. 8; t. 4, pp. 574, 575.

temptation either through their own fault, because they do not correspond with grace, or, without any fault on their part, because they have no vocation or have no Director capable of guiding them.

## CHAPTER III

### BY WHAT SIGNS MAY IT BE RECOGNIZED THAT A SOUL IS CALLED TO CONTEMPLATION?

I OMIT the extremely rare case where a soul is immediately raised to perfect Contemplation. It is a miracle of grace which we admire in Our Lord's Apostles on the day of Pentecost; in a Catherine of Sienna, raised to ecstatic union as soon as she was six years old;[1] in a St. Francis Xavier[2] and other Saints. Such favors fall under no law. I am speaking here only of what commonly happens.

The two following signs are necessary in order to recognize whether a soul is called to Contemplation.

First, the impossibility of meditating. When God wishes to raise a soul to Contemplation which essentially excludes all reasoning, He begins by withdrawing from it the possibility of applying itself to the effort of meditating. This first sign is not enough,

[1] Bollandists, t. 12, p. 870, n. 29. [2] *Breviary*, 3 December.

since the powerlessness may arise from several other causes.

The first is tepidity, which removes all impulse towards spiritual things, especially towards Meditation. The second is the usual spiritual dryness which makes all that is connected with prayer very painful. The third is a state of ill-health. A tired brain prevents reflection and general weakness is incompatible with real work on the part of the understanding. The fourth is a movement of the Holy Ghost which carries the soul to affective prayer where the reasoning ceases to exist.

A second sign is therefore necessarily required, one which excludes the four hypotheses of tepidity, ordinary spiritual dryness, a trial arising from bodily health, and a movement of grace towards affections. It consists in a simple and loving knowledge of God which takes possession of the soul in the midst of a profound peace, when it places itself in the presence of God. It is not, however, necessary that this loving attention to God should dispel all wandering of spirit; it is enough for it to be, as it were, a blessed weight which attracts the distracted soul and leads it back unceasingly to its Divine Object.

" As soon as the soul," says St. John of the Cross, " places itself in the presence of God, it enters into possession of that profound peace where it drinks long draughts of the living waters of wisdom and love, without it being necessary to bring this water through the aqueducts of consideration, figures and forms. Thus a man who is urged by a burning thirst quenches it without effort on the bank of a clear stream. . . . Yet let us not forget that even in the midst of this recollection the fickleness of the imagination is wont to weary the soul in spite of the latter's will, which, far from taking part in the wanderings of the former power, experiences a keen suffering at seeing its peace and consolation troubled." [1]

St. Jane Frances de Chantal says in the same sense: " The most certain mark (of vocation) is when a soul delights in being alone, lovingly attentive to God, yet without any special consideration, in interior peace, quiet and rest, without the powers, memory, understanding and will (at least not for any length of time), doing any work by passing from any subject to another, thus remaining

[1] *Montée du Carmel*, 1: 2, ch. 14, t. 2, pp. 196, 198.

attentive and gazing upon God in a general and loving manner." [1]

I will conclude with another important point. As has just been said, no active mental prayer, however perfect, can unfailingly lead to infused Contemplation. At most, it can lead only to the boundary, which cannot be crossed unless God grants the free gift of grace, which He gives to whom He wills. But at least are not supernatural Visions and Speech a sure sign of a vocation to Contemplation? A young man hears, as did St. Aloysius of Gonzaga, an interior voice telling him to enter the religious life. Must he conclude that he will be raised to Contemplation if he obeys this voice? This is not the necessary conclusion. Yet supernatural graces are often connected, and one should, while exercising discretion, take a divine message of this kind into account.

[1] *Œuvres*, Plon, 1876, t. 3, p. 297.

## CHAPTER IV

### HOW THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES OF ST. IGNATIUS ARE A PREPARATION FOR INFUSED CONTEMPLATION

THE vocation to infused Contemplation has a twofold cause: God's predilection and the merits of Jesus Christ, through which all graces come to us. To show that this is so, God sometimes grants this favor to souls which are in no way prepared for it and refuses it to those adorned with great virtue. Yet Divine Wisdom most often takes into account certain dispositions which render a soul more fit to profit of the signal grace of Contemplation. The purpose of this chapter is to examine how far the *Exercises* of St. Ignatius place a soul which applies itself to them in the favorable conditions.

According to St. Bernard,[1] St. Ignatius,[2] St. John of the Cross,[3] St. Teresa,[4] The Imi-

[1] *Sermo 46 in Cant.*

[2] St. Ignace, *Vie* par le P. Bartoli, 1: 5, ch. 5.

[3] *Montée du Carmel*, 1: 1, ch. 11; *Cantiques*, str. 29; *Vive flamme d'amour*, str. 3.

[4] *Château intérieur*, 4e dem., ch. 2.

tation of Christ,[1] etc., four things are necessary to correspond with a contemplative vocation: Abnegation, humility, charity and calmness of soul in prayer.

It is easy to prove that these four conditions are fully realized in the *Exercises*.

1. The *Exercises* are a continual lesson in abnegation. "Let each one think," says St. Ignatius, "that he will benefit himself in all spiritual things in proportion as he goes out of his self-love, will and interest."[2] Such is the principle which the Saint develops throughout his book, from the beginning to the end.

2. Not only do the *Exercises* teach humility, but they are also penetrated with it as with a wholesome oil. Thus it is that in the fundamental meditation on Two Standards, the three following degrees which lead to perfection are read on the Standard of Jesus Christ: "The first, poverty as opposed to riches; the second, insult and contempt as opposed to worldly honor; the third, humility as opposed to pride. From these three degrees men will be led to all other virtues."[3]

[1] Bk. 1, ch. 11; Bk. 4, ch. 31.
[2] *Spiritual Exercises*, Election, Personal amendment.
[3] *Ibid.*, Two Standards, Part 2, Point 3.

And again, when speaking of consummate perfection, a passionate love of the cross, St. Ignatius calls it the *Third Degree of Humility*, his intention being to make us understand that without this virtue the sublime edifice would fall to pieces, like a house without foundations.

And in a more general way, whoever studies the book of the *Exercises*, easily recognizes that St. Ignatius has there spoken out of the abundance of a heart deeply attached to humility, and he thus preluded the wonderful doctrine which he came from the heights of Heaven to teach to St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi. "I, Ignatius, have been chosen by the Mother of your Spouse to instruct you on humility. So hear my words. Humility ought to be poured into the hearts of novices like oil into a lamp. And just as the oil fills the whole lamp, so all the powers of their souls must be filled with humility. Again, just as a lamp cannot give light without oil, so the novices cannot shed upon the monastery the brightness of perfection and sanctity if care is not taken to bring them to know themselves and to constantly train and test them in humility. They must be taught, then, how indispensable

to a true nun is this virtue, which is nothing but the unbroken consciousness of their nothingness and a perpetual joy in all that can inspire them with a sincere contempt for themselves, until all the powers of their soul are perfectly regulated."[1]

3. No meditation book is superior to the *Exercises* in arousing in the heart an ardent charity. As soon as the soul has cleansed itself of its sins and evil inclinations, everything in the Contemplations is arranged so as to produce a love of God, generous even to making a total offering of self, pure even to forgetting self-interest so as to think only of God's, ardent even to desiring what is most contrary to nature, persevering even to the last sigh. I do not need to prove this; it has already been done in the work on Ordinary Prayer.[2]

4. The methods of prayer in the *Exercises* establish the soul in calmness, peace, rest of mind, as far as human weakness assisted by ordinary grace allows. This too I have previously shown.[3]

[1] *Vie de sainte Madeleine de Pazzi*, par le P. Cépari, ch. 11.
[2] *Ordinary Prayer*, Part 5, ch. 1, 2.
[3] *Ibid.*, ch. 1, 2.

In conclusion: Let the souls to whom God has granted the grace of an attraction to the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius trust themselves to its spirit and methods without fear. If these souls are called to infused Contemplation, they will here find a sure and easy means of fully corresponding with their sublime vocation. If the contrary supposition is true, the *Exercises* will lead them far on the road of solid virtue and true sanctity.

## CHAPTER V

### TO WHAT EXTENT MAY EXTRAORDINARY GRACES BE DESIRED?

If it is a question of distinct supernatural graces, such as Visions and Speech, they are not to be desired. This is fully evident from the second chapter of Part IV. If, on the contrary, it is a question of confused and general graces accompanied by admiration and love, in a word, of the graces of Contemplation, the answer is different according to cases.

If God has shown by sure signs that a soul has already received the quite free grace of passive prayer, it may desire and ask in prayer to make progress in this. Yet this desire must be accompanied by humility and detachment. By humility, so that the soul shall esteem itself unworthy of this favor; by detachment, so that it may desire the grace only so as to better sanctify itself and return more glory to God. This is the universal counsel.

Thus St. Ignatius wrote to St. Francis Borgia, who had already been raised to the

prayer of Contemplation: " I do not mean by that, that we should seek for them (supernatural gifts) solely for the satisfaction or pleasure we find in them. No indeed. But recognizing within us that without these gifts all our thoughts, words and works are confused, cold and troubled, we should desire these gifts so that by their means these thoughts, words and works may become fervent, clear and righteous to God's greater service. From this it results that we ought to wish for these precious gifts, wholly or in part, and these spiritual graces, as far as with their assistance we shall be able to procure greater glory for God." [1]

If, on the contrary, no grace of passive prayer at all has been received, we say with St. Alphonsus de Liguori that it is *surer* not to have the slightest desire for supernatural graces in prayer and to aspire only at attaining sanctity by the usual way. Here are his words: " Graces which cut us off from faith are to be rejected with all one's strength, since they consist in certain distinct knowledge, as do Visions and revelations. Those which are consistent with faith, on the contrary, should

[1] *Lettres*, Lettre 58, pp. 269, 270.

not be rejected, such as confused and general knowledge and divine touches which unite the soul to God. Nay more, the soul may humbly ask for and desire them, with the object of uniting itself more and more to God and of strengthening itself in His holy Love. Yet this is meant for souls who already receive like favors, since for the others the *surest* way is to desire and beg for only the active union which is, as has already been said, the union of our will with God's." [1]

This is a very wise doctrine, for generally, when the heart is elsewhere, there remains no desire of perfecting oneself in one's state. Consequently, when a soul which is being led by ordinary prayer aspires to Contemplation, it has no longer either attraction or courage to sanctify itself in its own way, which is Meditation.

That is the first and very grave reason. There are others, which St. Teresa explains in these terms: "I have not the slightest doubt, my Daughters, that you long to soon see yourselves in this state, and you are right. For, I repeat, the soul cannot understand either the graces with which God then favors

[1] *Homo apostolicus*, App. 1, n. 23.

it or the love with which He draws it to Him. It is, then, right for you to desire to learn how one attains a similar happiness. I will tell you what I know about it, though speaking only of God's usual manner of procedure and leaving on one side the extraordinary cases where He grants this grace only because He so wills it. When it is a question of this kind, He has His own reasons, which it is not our place to seek to examine.

"First, my Daughters, practise what I recommended in the preceding dwellings; and then humility, since it is by this virtue that Our Lord allows Himself to be overcome and yields to all our desires. The first mark by which you may recognize whether you have this virtue, is the belief of your unworthiness to receive so eminent a favor as that of enjoying God, and not even thinking that it ought ever to be granted to you in this life. But, you will say, how can we obtain these graces if we make no effort to that end?

"My answer is that there is no better means than that which I have just pointed out, and that of refraining from all effort, and this for five reasons. The first, because what is above all necessary in order to receive a similar

favor, is a disinterested love of God. The second, because it is want of humility to flatter oneself that a thing of so great value can be obtained by such wretched services as ours. The third, because the true preparation for the reception of such favors, after having offended God, is not to long for consolations, but to imitate Our Lord in desiring to suffer for Him as He has suffered for us. The fourth, because God is not obliged to give us these graces in this world, without which we can save our souls, as He is obliged to give us His glory in the other, if we keep His commandments. Besides, He knows better than we what is best for us and which are the souls that have a true love for Him. That it is so, we are not allowed to doubt. I myself know people who, while traversing this path of love, that is, aspiring solely to serve their crucified Jesus, not only do not desire or ask Him for these consolations and pleasures, but beg of Him not to give them to them in this life. What I say is indeed a fact. The fifth reason is that we should be wasting time in seeking these pleasures. This water, like that of contentment, does not come by means of aqueducts. If God, who is their source, does not make

them gush forth, we should be tiring ourselves to no purpose. All our desires, all our meditations, all our tears and all the efforts which we can make for this are useless. God alone gives this heavenly water to him whom He wills. He not seldom gives it only when one is thinking least about it. We belong to Him, my Sisters; let Him dispose of us according to His will and lead us as shall be pleasing to Him." [1]

Nothing more in conformity with the Gospel and nothing more discreet could be said. Contemplation is the beginning of eternal beatitude and is consequently a great promotion for the soul which is introduced to it. The best disposition, then, in attaining it, if God calls, is humility, according to Our Divine Master's teaching: "Every one that exalteth himself, shall be humbled; and he that humbleth himself, shall be exalted." [2]

But in what does this true humility consist? Here is Our Lord's answer: "When thou art invited to a wedding, sit not down in the first place, lest perhaps one more honor-

[1] *Château intérieur*, 4e demeure, ch. 2, towards the end; t. 3, pp. 363, 364.

[2] Luke 14: 11.

able than thou is invited by him; and he that invited thee and him, come and say to thee, Give this man place: and then thou begin with shame to take the lowest place. But when thou art invited, go, sit down in the lowest place: that when he who invited thee cometh, he may say to thee: 'Friend, go up higher.' Then shalt thou have glory before them that sit at table with thee." [1]

To pass from the parable to the reality, the banquet is mental prayer, where the soul is nourished with heavenly food and where there are two kinds of places, Meditation and Contemplation. The surest means of arriving at the more distinguished place of Contemplation is to remain in the more humble one of Meditation until the Master, who is God, says: "Go up higher."

We read again in the Holy Gospel that James and John, the beloved disciples of Our Saviour, went up to Him and asked to be seated one on the right and one on the left of Him in His glory. And Jesus answered them: "You know not what you ask. Can you drink of the chalice that I drink of, or be baptized with the baptism wherewith I am bap-

[1] Luke 14: 8, etc.

tized? But they said to Him: We can. And Jesus saith to them: You shall indeed drink of the chalice that I drink of: and with the baptism wherewith I am baptized, you shall be baptized. But to sit on My right hand, or My left, is not Mine to give to you, but to them for whom it is prepared." [1]

Alas, how many souls who earnestly desire and ask for Contemplation without having real signs of vocation fall into the same mistake as the sons of Zebedee! They deserve the lesson which Our Lord gave these dear disciples: "You know not what you ask. Can you drink of the chalice that I drink of; or be baptized with the baptism wherewith I am baptized?"

Lastly, even when Contemplation, a perfectly free gift, has been long desired and prayed for, it often happens that it is not attained; from which results a disastrous deception in the spiritual life. What a trial for a soul! Its prayers, its efforts in the practice of virtue and sacrifices of every kind were intended for years to raise it up to the delightful source of Contemplation, so that it might there drink the waters of a heavenly joy.

[1] Mark 10: 35–40.

But the source always remains distant and it has never been able to slake its thirst at it. Sadness, discouragement and bitterness overwhelm it, a great obstacle to progress in virtue, according to the word of the Holy Ghost: "Sadness hath killed many, and there is no profit in it." [1]

It must be admitted that an indifference so great that one does not desire Contemplation more than Meditation, because one is seeking in prayer only God's good pleasure, is enough to avert these dangers; but such perfect virtue is very rare. If, then, there are no certain signs of vocation to Contemplation it is surer to aspire to holiness only by the usual path of Meditation.

[1] Ecclus. 30: 25.

## CHAPTER VI

### TO WHAT EXTENT IS THE READING OF BOOKS TREATING OF EXTRAORDINARY STATES TO BE ALLOWED TO PIOUS SOULS?

READING of this kind is neither to be counselled nor permitted to all pious souls indiscriminately.

A first unhappy result would be the stirring up in several of them the imprudent desire for extraordinary graces, a desire which would inevitably be accompanied by the serious drawbacks which have just been pointed out.[1]

A second, and still more lamentable result, would be to persuade souls who are given to self-analysis, that they have the characteristics of a true vocation to extraordinary paths, which in reality they have not. A dangerous error and one difficult to dispel. St. Francis of Sales knew such illusions well:

"With regard to the danger there is in wanting to know so many ways of attaining perfection," he says, "I remember having spoken to two nuns belonging to two well

[1] See the preceding chapter.

reformed orders, one of whom by dint of having read Blessed Teresa's books, learnt so well to speak like her that she seemed to be a little Mother Teresa. And she herself believed it, picturing to herself so vividly all that Mother Saint Teresa had done during her life, that she believed that she herself did quite the same, even going so far as to have bindings of mind and suspension of its powers, just as she read that the Saint had had; so that she spoke of them very well. There are others who, by dint of thinking of the life of St. Catherine of Sienna and St. Catherine of Genoa, think that they are St. Catherines by imitation." [1] Opposition must be made to such evils from the beginning.

All exaggeration, however, must be avoided. If it is a case of humble, wise and prudent souls who esteem solid virtue above all else, nothing stands in the way of their being allowed or even advised to make reading of this kind. It would be both too severe and really not wise to forbid them to read this kind of books, whether they have already been called to extraordinary paths, or whether, having been led by the usual road, they simply

[1] *Vrais entretiens spirituels*, 9° entr., t. 6, pp. 139, 140.

possess the desire of raising their heart to heavenly thoughts.

Experience teaches this: Souls who, after having obtained advice, read with a pure intention these books burning with love of God, find in them disdain for the world, and ardent love of God and an insatiable desire of working and suffering much for His glory. These are signal advantages of which souls ought not to be lightly deprived.

But in order to obtain this blessed result, the mystic writings must in the first place be sure in doctrine, otherwise the words of the Gospel will be seen to be realized: "if the blind lead the blind, both fall into the pit." [1] In the second place, they must be especially calculated to increase Divine love in the soul, with all its accompanying virtues. Such are the works of St. Bernard, St. Bonaventure, St. John of the Cross, St. Francis of Sales, St. Alphonsus Rodriguez, St. Alphonsus Liguori, St. Teresa, St. Catherine of Sienna, St. Gertrude, St. Catherine of Genoa, Blessed Angela of Foligno, Blessed Margaret Mary and other writers, whose secure teaching raises the soul to heavenly thoughts, makes it love God more

[1] Matth. 15: 14.

and inspires it with a burning zeal to work for His glory.

Finally, this reading, however excellent it may be, cannot dispense with the advice of a virtuous, learned, prudent and experienced Director.

## CHAPTER VII

### WHAT IS TO BE THE CONDUCT OF A SOUL RAISED TO CONTEMPLATION WHEN MAKING A PRIVATE RETREAT?

It is evident that this soul should follow the attraction of grace both as to the choice of subject and method of prayer. The guidance of the Holy Ghost, Who communicates Himself in a very special manner to it, must always be respected, without prejudice, however, to the control of a learned and prudent Director. Yet except a quite special and contrary attraction be felt, we believe that this soul will gain by taking a book of serious retreat, such as the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius. St. Francis of Sales praises them in the following words: "It is a holy method well-known to the early Christians, but since then almost entirely discarded, until that great servant of God, Ignatius of Loyola, brought it into use again." [1] St. Charles Borromeo used to say of these *Exercises:* "They are my whole

[1] *Traité de l'amour de Dieu*, 1: 12, ch. 8.

library." [1] St. Leonard of Port Maurice of the Order of Friars Minor, esteemed them so highly that he composed a whole book of commentaries upon them. [2]

It is very easy to justify the advice just given. In the first place, every contemplative soul should, during its retreat, purify itself from the stains of sins and imperfections accumulated during the year. It should, in addition, fill itself with the spirit of the Gospel, so entirely opposed to that of the world. And lastly, it must apply itself more and more to the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ Our Lord, from Whom all grace comes to us. In all these ends the book of the *Exercises* cannot fail to be of great use to it, at least for the reading and considerations which it is well to make during a retreat.

And then this privileged soul does not know what measure of this entirely free grace of Contemplation it will receive during prayer, and is rashly exposing itself to the danger of being invaded by distractions if it has prepared no subject.

St. Teresa had received the grace of Con-

[1] Bollandists, t. 34, p. 798, 94.
[2] *Œuvres de saint Leonard*, Casterman, 1886.

templation, and yet St. Francis Borgia advised her to begin to pray by applying her mind to a mystery of the Passion, and if afterwards Our Lord raised her to a supernatural state without any effort on her own part, she should give herself up to His guidance.[1] St. Jane Frances de Chantal, who was raised to Contemplation, nevertheless prepared her points of prayer during her yearly retreats. We read this in her order of the day: " In the morning as soon as I am dressed and have read my points of prayer, I make it. . . . When the bell for office rings and I am not going, I say it in a low voice, then I read my second point of prayer. . . . After Vespers I read a little and prepare my subject of prayer." [2]

This humble way of acting, in short, is quite in harmony with Our Divine Master's teaching: in order to deserve being raised to the first place, we must begin by taking the last. It is, too, richly blessed by God, as experience proves. When a simple, humble, contemplative soul prepares from a solid book the points of the Annunciation, the Nativity,

[1] *Vie par elle-même*, ch. 24; t. 1, p. 278.
[2] *Œuvres de saint Chantal*, Ed. Plon, t. 2, pp. 68, 69.

the Hidden Life, the Crucifixion and other subjects, it not rarely happens that God, Who exalts the humble, copiously pours upon its intellect and heart the living waters of wisdom and love, throwing sublime light on all these mysteries. These the soul would not have received had it neglected to prepare the points. Contemplative souls, however, must not, in the preparation and especially in the making of the meditation, be tied down to the same methods as souls led by the usual path. These souls, who are most often raised to Supernatural Recollection, cannot consider a mystery as is done in Meditation, and the action of the Holy Ghost must be fully respected. Even suppose that all supernatural grace has been taken from them as a trial, these souls should be allowed to follow their individual attraction which leads them to meditate in a more peaceful and affectionate way.[1]

But above all, if at the very moment these souls place themselves in the presence of God, they feel a delightful peace take possession of them, if they drink long draughts of the living waters of wisdom and love in a simple and

[1] See Part 2, ch. 2.

loving gaze upon God, they should obey the Divine call and without fear give up the subject prepared. One must not, it is true, take a higher place of one's own accord, for that would be pride. But it would be equally strange and foolish not to comply with the Master's gentle invitation at the banquet: "Friend, go up higher." [1]

This must be the conduct of the contemplative soul when God invites it to imperfect Contemplation, and with much more reason, when it feels called to perfect Contemplation and the wounds of love. These words of the Divine Spouse are addressed to those who direct such souls: "I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes and harts of the fields, that you stir not up, nor awake my beloved, till she please."[2]

"There are Directors," says St. John of the Cross, "who disturb the repose of calm and peaceful Contemplation, in which God places these souls and where they aspire to dwell. They force them to meditate, to reason out and produce acts, in spite of the dislike, repugnance, dryness and distractions they find in so doing. . . . Now, since these souls

[1] Luke 14: 10. [2] Cant. 3: 5.

can no longer do this nor devote themselves to the exercises of the past, because the time is over for them and it is no longer their method, they are a prey to a twofold anguish, believing they are rushing to destruction. Their guides only confirm this distressing thought, throwing them into dryness and making them lose the precious unctions they received from God in solitude and prayer—an immense misfortune. Instead of this gentle rest in God, only a little sadness is left to them and a life dragged out in following the most usual paths, so that these poor souls experience on the one hand an irreparable loss, and on the other, fatigue themselves in vain. These men know very little of the spiritual life. They are strangely wanting in the supreme respect due to Our Saviour, and they wrong Him, in daring to interfere with His Divine work by their clumsy methods." [1]

This does not mean, however, that such souls can dispense with a Director. Contemplative souls who make private retreats, have positive need of a capable guide, or at least of having their method of prayer previously

[1] *Vive flamme d'amour*, Strophe 3, n. 11, t. 4, pp. 585, 586.

receive the approval of a man conversant with supernatural ways. They otherwise run the risk of falling into serious illusions.

## CHAPTER VIII

### WHAT SHARE SHOULD RELIGIOUS RAISED TO CONTEMPLATION TAKE IN GENERAL RETREATS?

It is a mistake to believe that contemplative souls cannot profit of the points of a retreat given to the community, because God instructs them better in Contemplation in a single day than the best books in many weeks. These souls indeed need to be more penetrated by the pure spirit of the Gospel in proportion as they are favored by higher graces. Now, it is in the order of Providence that the spirit of Jesus Christ Our Lord should fully enter a soul only by means of human instruction. Thus has the Eternal Wisdom ordained. The Gospel has been spread throughout the world not by the interior action of the Holy Ghost alone, but by the preaching of Apostles, and the infallible interpretation of the revealed doctrine is not reserved to the great contemplatives but to the dogmatic teaching of the Sovereign Pontiff and of the Councils.

A second advantage of general retreats is the lavish graces bestowed when a number of hearts unite in prayer. "If two of you," says Our Lord, "shall consent upon earth concerning any thing whatsoever they shall ask, it shall be done to them by My Father Who is in Heaven. For where there are two or three gathered together in My name, there I am in the midst of them." [1]

The prayer of the Apostles in the Cenacle with the holy women and Mary the Mother of Jesus was answered by the greatest streams of wisdom and grace that have ever existed.[2] The Cenacle transforming contemplative souls is sometimes the general retreat. In any case, they will always find there abundant light and burning love.

Let it be enough for me to cite the authority of St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi in support of this. In her convent of Florence, several of the nuns were led by the path of Contemplation and yet, says her biographer, "She understood the aim and method of the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius so well, that from that time until the end of her life it was she who gave them to her Sisters, teaching them

[1] Matth. 18: 19, 20. [2] Acts 1: 14.

exactly how to put into practice the lights and inspirations which God communicated to them by this precious means. To this is due the custom which this venerable convent has maintained of making the *Spiritual Exercises* every year; which contribute more and more to perfecting the nuns in the spirit and practice of holy prayer." [1]

Yet contemplative souls must not be required to meditate in the same way as others on the points heard read. Each thing in its place. They doubtless need to be instructed in the duties of the religious life and consequently should listen to public instruction humbly, attentively and with a sincere desire to learn. But once the points are finished, God reserves it to Himself to speak to the contemplative soul without the medium of a human voice. Let the Creator, then, be allowed to treat with the creature, the Father with His son, the Spouse with His betrothed.

In conclusion, the general retreat has indisputable advantages for Religious raised to Contemplation. It is best, therefore, for them not to exempt themselves from it, unless for grave reasons, such as the duties of their

[1] *Vie*, par le P. Cépari, ch. 24.

office, an attraction so powerful that it appears clearly the expression of the Divine Will, etc. The soul should then follow the path pointed out and make a private retreat.

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